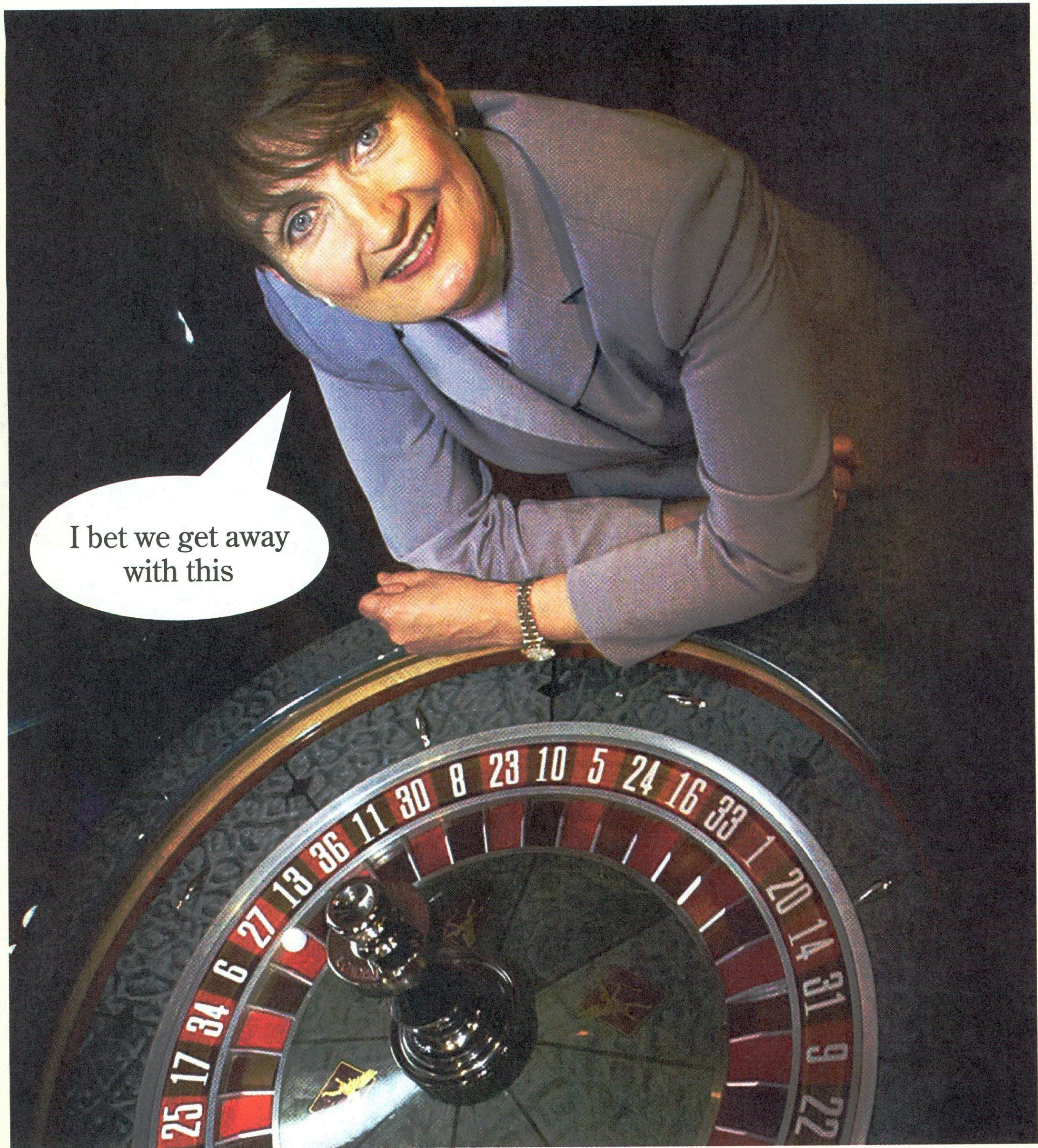




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Gnome

ILL-INFORMED commentators have been attempting to suggest that my expenses as a member of the House of Lords (as well as those of many of my colleagues in both Houses) somehow constitute a major scandal. Nothing could be further from the truth.

My four homes, in various parts of the country, are rightly funded by the taxpayer at a very reasonable annual cost of £2 million. They are essential for a man like myself who is compelled, *inter alia*, to spend at least two evenings a week working late at night in London with my personal researcher-cum-masseuse, Ms Rita Chevrolet (who, incidentally, earns every penny of her modest £180,000-a-year salary).

The other items that commentators have seen fit to question are trifling administrative costs, vital for a man at the hub of British public life. To wit: Postage £217,000; Toiletries £124,000; Wall-to-wall carpeting £78,400; Lightbulbs £22,000; Leopard-skin accessories £413,000.

As you can see from these figures, I have nothing whatsoever to be ashamed of and I sincerely hope and trust that this will be the end of the matter.

E. Strobes, pp. Lord Gnome,



SUBMITTING the report of his working group on 14-19 reform to education secretary Charles Clarke last week, Mike Tomlinson was clear why change was essential in the education system.

"The status quo is not an option... Too many young people leave education lacking basic and personal skills... employers are having to spend large sums of money to teach the 'basics'."

As if to illustrate his point, the covering letter from which these quotes are taken was addressed to the "Department for Education and Skills".

POWDERJECT, the company which Blairite groupie Lord Drayson founded and ran until last year, has often been at the centre of political controversy in Britain thanks to its lucrative government contracts. Now it has been dragged into the American presidential election.

As we reported in the last *Eye*, production has been suspended at the factory in Merseyside that was due to provide millions of flu jabs for both Britain and America this winter, following allegations of "contamination problems". This has caused panic in the US, which was relying on the British plant for about half its vaccine supplies, and became a hot topic in the final televised debate between George Bush and John Kerry.

Last week the Kerry-Edwards campaign launched a 60-second radio advert attacking Bush for failing to foresee the vaccine crisis. "What's happening with the flu vaccine," Kerry thunders, "is really an example of everything this administration does – deny it, pretend it's not there and then try to hide it when it comes out and act surprised."

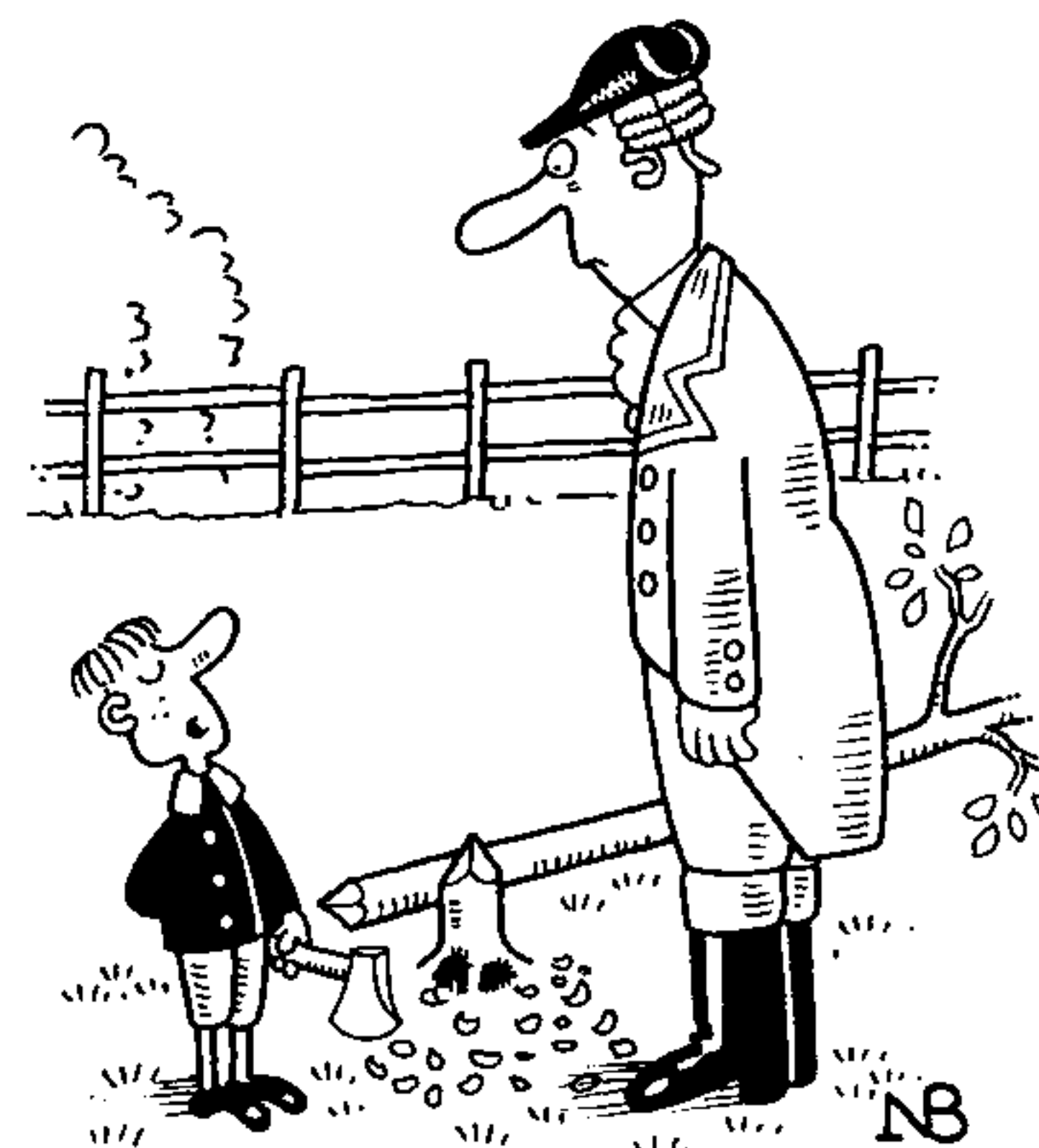
But how could Bush have guessed that the British authorities would suspend the factory's licence? This question is now being investigated by a federal grand jury. Subpoenas have already been issued against Chiron, the American firm which bought Powderject from Drayson last year for £542m. Rumour has it that the former boss – who gave Labour £505,000 in June this year, just weeks after being awarded a peerage – may also be "invited" to help with their inquiries.

DESPERATE to fatten itself up ahead of its planned demutualisation in a couple of years, Standard Life has slashed its policy-holders' benefits in a particularly duplicitous fashion.

Four years ago the company promised endowment customers there would be "no shortfalls". But it has now found this makes it unattractive to the City, so it has simply broken the promise. Customers will receive between 40 and 60 percent of what they originally thought they would – which Standard Life justifies by pointing out that the small-print in its policies actually offered no promise at all.

As a way of doing business, this might be thought sharp practice and possibly something the Office of Fair Trading ought to look at. But the company must have thought of this and decided everything was above board. After all, among Standard Life's non-executive directors, responsible for making sure it runs its business properly, is Tory peer Lord Blackwell, who also happens to be on the board of... the Office of Fair Trading.

ALTERNATIVE HISTORY



"I chopped the cherry tree down, father, because it was potentially dangerous"

ENERGY MINISTER Mike O'Brien has found more top flight managers for the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency (NDA) to work with chairman Sir Anthony Cleaver.

The NDA has the task of cleaning up the mess left by Britain's nuclear industry and could provide a massive bail-out for the nuclear firms, taking over their present and even future liabilities and so allowing British Energy and BNFL to float free back into profit.

But will the new appointments stand up for the public interest in conflicts with nuclear firms? Don't bet on it.

They include Tony Cooper, chairman of the Nuclear Industry Association (NIA), which is a lobby group funded by BNFL, British Energy and other atomic contractors. As the "representative body for the British civil nuclear industry" the NIA speaks up for the very people who made the mess the NDA now has to clean up (with costs passed to the taxpayer).

Cooper will be joined by Primrose Stark, an old hand at profiting from public loss. A former British Rail manager, she cashed in on rail privatisation in 1996 as one of the directors of First Engineering, originally a management buy-out of part of British Rail's engineering wing. In 1998 First Engineering directors sold their shares to another company, Peterhouse, making a fantastic windfall and showing how cheaply First Engineering had been sold off. Stark herself made more than £3m. Following her involvement in the botched privatisation of railways, she is now one of those in charge of Britain's nuclear future

Every one a winner

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EDITORIAL

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LABOUR'S GAMBLE 2



NEWS

THIS month war-ravaged Iraq has handed over \$200m to wealthy corporations, much of it to make up for "lost profits" as a result of the first Gulf war. It was the latest installment of a \$18bn bill paid via the United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC), which has overseen the reparations payments to countries, individuals and companies since the 1991 peace settlement.

Last June it was agreed that 5 percent of all funds raised from sales of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas from Iraq would be handed over to the UNCC to be handed over to the claimants. The UNCC has published detailed reports of its deliberations for all to see (at www.unog.ch/uncc/), listing how much companies have applied for over the past 13 years and how much they got – or why they were refused.

Sums paid out range from \$14bn to the Kuwait Petroleum Company to £900 to UK-based Walkers Shortbread for lost biscuits. While many companies did indeed lose buildings and other assets in the

first Gulf war, others are applying for funds to compensate them for lost profits and "business decline". These include British Airways (given \$6m), Unilever (given £600,000) and British American Tobacco (which bid for \$2m but was only given \$10,000).

Many of the companies seeking compensation are those now raking in huge profits from reconstruction work in Iraq following the latest war. Halliburton received \$18m. United Technology Corporation had its \$31m bid to the UNCC rejected – but is no doubt comforted by the \$4.5bn worth of military contracts it garnered in 2003.

Nestlé, meanwhile, seems to have learned nothing from the unpopularity of its attempt to sue Ethiopia, has received more than \$5m.

It's also interesting to see which companies have been trying it on with the UNCC, applying for funds to which they are not entitled or cannot prove they are entitled. The Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) – which had far more problems than just the invasion of Kuwait in 1990-91 – had the nerve to ask for £16m to mitigate losses resulting from letters of credit issued by Iraqi banks. They were given \$0. Gallaher International, Ecico International, KPMG and Smithkline Beecham (now GSK) are just a few of the UK-based companies refused hundreds of thousands each because their claims were found to be "unsubstantiated" by the UN.

In a country where even the more peaceful areas are struggling to keep the water and electricity running, even a tiny proportion of the cash handed out to compensate firms for lost profits – money they never actually had in the first place – would go a long way towards reconstruction.

THERE'S a spanking new bypass in the Cheshire town of Crewe – £4m worth of tarmac, designed to relieve chronic congestion – and though it was finished ahead of schedule in August, it's been standing empty for more than a month while the Queen's Duchy of Lancaster estate refuses to allow it to open.

The Crewe Green Link Road is built on Duchy-owned land and the estate stands to do very well out of the development since areas next to the road will be opened up for development. As a result of this, Cheshire county council is asking the Duchy, along with the North West Development Agency, to contribute to the cost of the road.

The Duchy had agreed to support the road, but after the NWDA proposed that it should pay less while those who stand to make millions from the land should pay more, the estate bosses felt they were being asked to cough up too much. As letters flew between Cheshire county bosses and the Queen, local drivers were left wondering why they can't use the lovely new stretch of road. A November opening date is now on the cards.

Screen OF Shame

RICHARD Desmond may have paid himself a grand total of £46.2m last year, but he still has time to think of those less fortunate than himself – his hapless editors. He graciously invited them all to buy tickets for his recent charity bash at Ronnie Scott's to raise money for cancer victims.

Deciding that non-attendance would not be a good career move, his loss-leading tabloid bosses forked out £500 a head to see their tub-thumping pop idol perform with Roger Daltrey, Greg Lake and other ageing has-beens. Quite a high price for the lowest-paid editors in Fleet Street. But not so high as to stop *Daily Express* editor Peter Hill's shadowy right-hand man Hugh "Huge" Whittow throwing £2,000 into Des's hat for four tickets. His promotion through Desmond's journalistic firmament now seems assured.

ANNIE Lennox-lookalike Dawn Neesom, statuesque editor of the *Daily Star*, has an alluring new item in her wardrobe.

Following the paper's move to a spectacular HQ in the City, Dawn's six-inch heels, fishnet stockings and smart suits are now complemented by a pair of yellow Marigold gloves. The rubber-gloved editor can often be seen polishing her hacks' work surfaces and binning the day's papers before anyone has had chance to read them.

And with good reason. Richard "Dirty" Desmond is obsessed with keeping the offices squeaky clean, and has threatened that anyone who soils the new building will be exiled to his Siberian outpost in Broughton, Lancashire.

Promotional staff on the first floor learnt exactly what Desmond's clean-desk policy meant on their first day in 10 Lower Thames Street, when after finishing work they adjourned to the Walrus and Carpenter over the road for a swift sherbet. Not wishing to clutter up the pub with laptops and mobiles, they left them on their desks in the office. On returning an hour later to collect their stuff and go home, they found the whole lot had been dumped in a skip in the car park by Desmond's henchman, Martin "Rottweiler" Ellice, the highest-paid binman in London.

THROUGHOUT her six months of treatment for a brain tumour, the *Daily Mail* kept quiet about Lynda Lee-Potter's illness,

announcing each week on her usual page that "Lynda Lee-Potter will return soon".

She had more success in keeping her condition secret than another brain tumour sufferer, Mo Mowlam, who was forced out into the open about her radiotherapy and steroid treatment when a newspaper columnist derided her appearance, writing that "she's developed several chins, shoulders like Frank Bruno, and bears an undeniable resemblance to an only slightly effeminate Geordie trucker."

The columnist in question was of course the first lady of Fleet Street, Lynda Lee-Potter.

Amid the fusillade of tributes to her was one from Anne Robinson, who told the *Mail*: "Lynda and I met in 1967. She was very attractive and bouncy and freckly – one of the amazing things about Lynda was that her style never changed. It never needed to because she went on looking incredibly young in a very Doris Day way."

Presumably it was a different Lynda Lee-Potter whom Robinson described in the *Telegraph* last May as "well north of 65... Like the picture that accompanies her weekly column? I think not", claiming that that Lee-Potter had grilled her for the name of her plastic surgeon.



"En-suite woods..."

THE *Sun* devoted its front page to wronged woman and inexplicable celebrity Abi Titmuss on 21 October, giving its full support to her legal battle to "ban a pornographic video showing her romping with a girl pal".

"TV's Abi, 28, is horrified that the filthy film – stolen and copied after being shot at the home of her ex-lover John Leslie – has become available to every drooling porn fan in Britain," the paper reported, helpfully pointing out that the movie is "a big hit on the internet".

But where could eager mouse-clickers look for this "girl-on-girl flick"? Well, they could do worse than look on the *Sun*'s website, which illustrated the story with four large stills from the tape, each with a handy instruction: "click picture to enlarge".

NEWS arrives of Sir Nicholas Lloyd, the forgotten man of journalism who, older readers will recall, was once a high-powered Fleet Street editor (well, the *Daily Express* anyway) but is now reduced to doing PR for the likes of Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Tagging along with his wife Eve Pollard, another ex-editor and occasional media pundit for the *London Evening Standard*, Lloyd had his knightly ego badly dented while attending a reception at St James's Palace for the npf, the trendy new name for the Newspaper Press Fund, the journalists' charity. When the Polloyds were introduced to the Queen, Brenda she must have been very puzzled by the name badges the pair wore.

The voluptuous Lady L, invited because of her fund-raising for the fund, bore the legend "Ms Eve Pollard, Past Appeal Chairman"; while Lloyd's badge identified him only as "Sir Nicholas Lloyd, Husband of Sue Pollard".

The sniffy Lloyd was not amused. But as the assembled hacks all concluded, imagine how the scatty actress Sue might have felt had she known.

THE Barclay Brothers are moving to get rid of the last fig leaf of the *Spectator's* Independent Board. Algy Cluff and the rest of the worthies are to be given their marching orders by the twins.

Now it'll just be the proprietors and, er, Boris...

IT MIGHT be thought that a basic prerequisite for employment on a pisspoor celebrity supplement in a newspaper was the ability to tell celebrities apart – but not, it seems on the *Daily Mail's* Femail section.

In an excruciating feature, "who is the most orange celebrity of all", hackette June Iddon revealed with a set of before and after pictures that too long on the sunbed had apparently turned Gloria Hunniford into... Judith Chalmers.

A CAUTIONARY tale for trainees on the *Evening Standard*. Being keen is fine, but wandering into editor Veronica Wadley's office to introduce yourself is not. If you then walk into the morning conference and try to work the room, you will find yourself escorted from the building by security guards.

This was the bitter experience of an aspirant hackette who recently lasted only half a day on Sebastian Shakespeare's *Londoners' Diary*.

ON 17 September the *Eye* suggested that more light would soon be shed on how the *Sunday Times* had obtained so many secret documents from a Whitehall source over the past year, and how it had kept that source happy.

Ten days later Inspector Knacker arrested a 23-year-old temp at the cabinet office, Claire Newell, who had worked in the *Sunday Times* newsroom in the summer of 2003.

Yet even now, a month later, the paper has still not reported her arrest. Its only oblique reference was a diary item on 17 October attacking the *Grauniad* for devoting so much space to media stories, "including the cabinet office mole hunt prompted by a series of leaks to the *Sunday Times*". It omitted to mention that the suspected mole had already been named by other newspapers, questioned by Special Branch and suspended from her job.

The coyness is understandable. Newell hasn't yet been charged with anything, but if she is put on trial *Sunday Times* executives will be cross-examined on oath about the precise nature of their financial relationship with the temporary civil servant. Inspector Knacker is already gathering evidence about the involvement of head of news Mark "Skippy" Skipworth as well as the hacks who acted as Newell's "handlers" – political editor David Cracknell and Insight-wallahs David Leppard and Robert Winnett.

Claire Newell's own bank balances will also be scrutinised closely. In August 2001 she posted this question on the website for aspirant hacks, HoldtheFrontPage.com: "Does Harlow college have a good reputation for journalism courses? I really would prefer to do a fast-track course, which Harlow offers, due to financial constraints." (Ironically, she added that "I am incidentally only really interested in feature writing as far as newspapers go.") On 3 September 2003, immediately after her work-experience stint at Wapping, she wrote a feature for the *Evening Standard* about the financial strain on young Londoners of a 25 percent rise in tube fares.

A trial will, of course, be no less embarrassing for the government. Although cabinet secretary Sir Andrew Turnbull ordered a leak inquiry many months ago, his sleuths (from a detective agency run by ex-MI5 men) somehow failed to notice that a security-cleared secretary in his department had worked for the *Sunday Times* as recently as last year – or that the five pieces which appeared under her by-line between June and August 2003 included three co-written with Robert Winnett, author of many of the subsequent stories based on leaked documents.

"Turnbull and the cabinet office were useless – there was no urgency," says one well-informed source. "It was only when stuff was leaked about the treasury and Gordon Brown hit the roof that a proper investigation began."

The last straw was a *Sunday Times* story revealing that senior mandarins had drawn up secret plans to give themselves pay rises of up to 90 percent. It noted that Sir Andrew Turnbull was "both technically responsible for the proposals... and prospectively one of the major beneficiaries." Even the dilatory Turnbull was suddenly roused to action by this impertinence. Lo and behold, Claire Newell was arrested the very next day.

She has now fled her flat in Conifer Gardens, Streatham and is being kept by the *Sunset Times* at a safe house. But if she is charged, she will have to answer questions in public sooner or later. And if it is established that the *Sunday Times* paid a civil servant to leak documents, she may not be the only person in the dock.

PRIVATE EYE EUPHEMISM BECOMES OFFICIAL

"Last night a senior Clarence House source admitted: 'It's fair to say Harry was fired up. He'd been drinking and was tired and emotional'."

– The *Sun*, Friday 22 October.

HACKWATCH

Beyond The Whinge

"**BORIS Johnson shouldn't apologise to Liverpool for the *Spectator* leader,**" Euan Ferguson wrote in the *Observer* on 17 October. "He should apologise for remaining a member of a political party which deliberately tore the heart from that city and made it the vulnerable self it is today."

But if everyone who offends Liverpool had to go on a penitential pilgrimage, half of Fleet Street would be on the next train to Lime Street. Including, er, Euan Ferguson – who on 20 October 2002 wrote this attack on John Lennon: "It could be argued that it was his narcissistic emoting, never shot through with the tiniest ray of intellectual rigour, which began the Liverpoolianisation of Britain and turned us into a country that fills its gutters with tears for girls we've never met."

That resonant coinage "Liverpoolianisation" had first appeared, again in the *Observer*, on 5 October 1997 when Jonathan Meades argued that Tony Blair's religiosity "accords perfectly with the Liverpoolianisation of Britain... no-holds-barred self-pity dressed as grief, self-congratulatory sentimentalism, an affirmation of itself through the appropriation of cosmetic Celtism".

The *Observer's* sister paper, the *Guardian*, has given Boris Johnson a thorough kicking over the past fortnight. It condemned the *Spectator* editorial as "insulting" and "vile". It also dispatched Ed Vulliamy to write a piece about how great Liverpool and Liverpoolians are. But amid all its sanctimonious tut-tutting over Boris's idiocy, there was no mention of the *Grauniad's* own articles on Liverpool, such as this from 24 May 1993: "The royal family has taken its whacks with a certain decent cheerfulness, something which compares interestingly with the intimidatory self-pity issuing from Liverpool if anyone suggests that idle, violent city is, well, an idle, violent city and not a citadel of delightful Scouser wit and defiance."

All a long time ago, of course. But surely the *Grauniad* can't have forgotten the column it published by Charlotte Raven on 26 June 2001? "Scousers' propensity to linger over every misfortune until another comes to replace it makes them uniquely suited to the demands of the Bulger mourning marathon," she wrote. "While other cities might have faltered and found something else to distract them, Liverpool's talent for nursing resentments ensured that it would feel, eight years on, just as enraged about Bulger's murder as it was the first moment it heard." Liverpoolians, she added, refuse to let anything go "as long as there's still a drop of righteous indignation to be squeezed".

A few days later, after a deluge of protest, the readers' editor announced that Raven's piece should never have been printed. Yet, oddly enough, it can still be found on the paper's website. Perhaps the *Grauniad* assumes that Scousers are too poor or thick to have the internet.

Another newspaper which has shown Boris Johnson no mercy is the *Times*. Andrew Pierce warned that the *Spectator's* "ill-judged attack on Liverpool" had caused "grievous offence", while Michael Gove denounced it as "a misjudgment of quite stonking proportions". Clearly the *Times* would never do anything so rash as to generalise about Scousers. Except that on 23 April 1989, after the Hillsborough disaster, it printed a column by Edward Pearce arguing that "the shrine in the Anfield goalmouth, the cursing of the police, all the theatricals, come sweetly to a city which is already the world capital of self-pity. There are soapy politicians to make a pet of Liverpool, and Liverpool itself is always standing by to make a pet of itself. 'Why us? Why are we treated like animals?' To which the plain answer is that a good and sufficient minority of you behave like animals."

Four years later, Walter Ellis covered the



Bulger murder for the *Times*. "Liverpool lives on emotion; fears and hatreds bubble constantly below the surface," he reported on 19 February 1993. "The mob, as self-pitying as it is self-righteous, is a constant presence, whether on tour in the Heysel Stadium, Brussels, or at home among the social dereliction of Liverpool 8, or as this week in the back streets of Bootle."

A 2,000-word *Times* feature by Michael Henderson on 21 November 1998 described Liverpool as "a city that often gives the impression of wearing its decline as a badge of honour". Henderson also quoted Alan Bennett, who had written of Liverpoolians' "built-in air of grievance" and the "cockiness that comes from being told too often that they and their city are special".

All these people must now apologise – as of course must the *Sunday Times*, which on 28 February 1993 ran a huge feature by Jonathan Margolis under the headline "SELF-PITY CITY". After watching lynch-mobs throwing rocks at police vans containing the two boys accused of murdering James Bulger, Margolis denounced the city as a "paranoia theme park" with a "self-pitying and incipiently barbaric culture".

But what do Liverpoolians themselves think of it? On 16 October the *Liverpool Daily Post* published an open letter to Boris Johnson from its editor, Jane Wolstenholme, attacking his "outdated, breathtakingly unfair [and] just plain unpleasant" comments about Scousers. "I do not recognise any 'flawed psychological state' in the people of Liverpool," she declared. "Contrary to the image you present of paranoid, self-pitying and defeated people, the Liverpoolians I meet are self-confident, optimistic, proud of their heritage and looking forward with enthusiasm to a more prosperous future."

So Wolstenholme would presumably have no truck with someone who called Liverpool a "whingeing" city. This is the word used only last month by none other than Sir David Henshaw, the chief executive of Liverpool City Council. At a conference marketing Liverpool as the 2008 European city of culture, he admitted that "sometimes it can still be the most mind-bogglingly awful and whingeing place, where the glass is always half-empty".

Was Henshaw forced to march through the streets in sackcloth and ashes? Not at all. An editorial in Wolstenholme's *Daily Post* on 15 September praised the "disarming candour" with which he had spoken: "Sir David has aired opinions which may leave some people feeling slighted, even wounded. But if it goads them into action, not one word has been spoken out of place."

Hacks and politicians should take note. Say that Scousers have a peculiar psyche and you'll never hear the end of it. Call them mind-bogglingly awful, however, and even the *Liverpool Daily Post* will congratulate you.

As long as you're a Scouser, of course.

UNFORTUNATE METAPHOR OF THE WEEK

"I cut my political teeth in Liverpool."
– Michael Howard, Saturday 16 October.



IN THE TEAROOM

SO, you're sitting at home and the phone rings. A pleasant-sounding woman with an accent very like your own says she's just calling to ask what you think of your local Labour MP. You say you don't know much about him but he seems a decent sort of cove on the whole. "Would it change your view," the woman asks, "if I told you that he regularly tortures cats and is a self-confessed player of the pink oboe?"

Next day you read in the papers that your MP's healthy 70 percent approval rating "reduced to only 12 percent when respondents were provided with more information about the MP's character and record". That's push-polling. Get used to it: it's set to be one of the Tories' election-fighting innovations.

Then there's the dog-whistle. First you find out what voters are naturally prejudiced about – asylum seekers, say – and then you super-subtly acknowledge that you understand their concern. Nothing so ham-fisted as playing the race card, mind. The reason it's called the dog-whistle is that your response isn't just off the record, it's off the scale.

It sure worked down under for John Howard's Liberals. As did what you might term "the fatuous sentiment poll". Earlier this year Australian electors were inundated with cheerful statistics showing that "93 percent of voters in marginal constituencies associate living in Australia with happiness" while 73 percent explicitly do NOT associate living in Australia with "being worried". Of course in this case the pollsters were cheering for the incumbent. In opposition you trot out figures showing that 93 percent think they're living in a rat-hole where none of the public services work.

The push-poll, the dog whistle and the sentiment poll are just a few of the techniques associated with the Canberra-based political consultancy Crosby-Textor, whose senior partner Lynton Crosby was appointed last week as the Conservatives' campaign guru. And the arrival of Crosby, combined with the party chairman's "Saatchi's Law" unveiled at their Bournemouth conference, has convinced a surprising number of Tories in the tearoom that they have an – albeit outside – chance of actually beating Blair next year.

They're bubbling with new buzz phrases about "below the line campaigns that localize the national out of the sight of mainstream media" and so forth. There's no doubt that Crosby is an infectious optimist. The party sought his advice once before – over IDS's chances. The irrepressibly cheerful antipodean told them that since his own John Howard, who was "as dull as batshit", had hacked it, he couldn't see why IDS shouldn't prove a winner too. Well, every Wunderkind is allowed one mistake.

'Quintus Slide'

BACKBENCH MPs on all sides of the House are increasingly furious at the prime minister's refusal to answer tricky questions over the Iraq war and the conclusions of the Iraq Survey Group over weapons of mass destruction.

Tony Blair's trick in response to pertinent questions – like what steps he took to validate claims made back in 1995 that Iraq had already destroyed all its WMDs – is simply to claim that he has already answered them. "I refer my hon Friend (Llew Smith) to the answer I gave... on 16

September 2004, Official report columns 1175-776," he says.

However, anyone bothering to check the reply will see that in response to no fewer than 63 separate and searching questions over Iraq, Blair's short and unhelpful reply was: "These matters have been examined during the course of the Butler review and other inquiries and covered during debates and statements on Iraq and briefings by my officials spokesman."

In other words, he wasn't going to answer any questions that may cause him embarrassment then and he certainly isn't going to now. MPs are investigating whether they can take any action against the Dear Leader over his apparent contempt for parliamentary scrutiny.

ALTHOUGH the freedom of information act comes into force in January, certain details – like the level of fees for information – have still not been settled.

These details may (or may not) have been discussed at the ministerial committee on freedom of information which was announced in May. Curious as to whether any decisions had been made, Lib Dem MP Matthew Taylor laid down a couple of written questions to the prime minister, asking whether fees had been discussed – and how often the committee had actually met since May.

The PM's answer – a hymn to the notion of freedom of information – was as follows: "It is established practice, as reflected in the Ministerial Code and under exemption 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of the Cabinet and its committees."

Don't expect a new culture of openness come the new year.



"I'm a lawyer. Here's my card... The taking of said card constitutes an agreement between the parties, henceforth known as the taker and the giver, to..."

IS IT a crime to mock Robert Kilroy-Silk? The MEP's research assistant, Tony Bennett, appears to think it might be.

"I represent Robert Kilroy-Silk and the UK Independence Party," he announces in a letter to the webmaster of a spoof site called ukindependence.org. "You are advised that your site will be reported to the police and we are currently taking the advice of a libel barrister as to its contents. I am a solicitor as well as a research assistant. You may wish to consider removing the site forthwith."

Anyone who visits the site will see a brief film in which a man urinates against the front window of a TV shop. The TV screen on the other side of the pane happens to be showing the permatanned face of Kilroy. Shocking indeed, and well worth the attention of Inspector Knacker.

However, Tony Bennett modestly omits to mention his own record of offensive behaviour. In 2002 he was hauled before a UKIP tribunal and banned from holding any party office for two years after writing a pamphlet describing the prophet Mohammed as a paedophile. In the same year he was sentenced to 50 hours' community service for stealing 29 metric road signs and daubing others with black paint. The judge denounced him as a "vandal" and "vigilante" who had "lied at the scene of the crime and lied to me". What better qualification could anyone have for acting as Kilroy's enforcer?

CROSS London Rail Links (CLRL), the joint venture between the government and Transport for London responsible for building a railway from east to west London, has a new chairman: Adrian Montague, darling of government privatisations over two decades.

Earlier this year Montague conducted the "expert review" of the business case for Crossrail. He confirmed that, with the right money available from government, business and council taxpayers, the project was indeed feasible (it is also vital to London's bid for the 2012 Olympics: see Signal Failures, page 10). Transport secretary Alistair Darling duly promised a parliamentary bill to pave the way as soon as possible and has now moved Montague into the top job to bring the rail-link to fruition.

When announcing such important new appointments, ministers normally refer gushingly to the glowing track record that the chosen one brings to the job. In this case, however, Darling simply mentioned that Montague "has extensive experience of working with government on major infrastructure projects". His reticence might be explained by what the experience is.

As a lawyer at city firm Linklaters, Montague advised former Tory prime minister John Major on how to privatise British Rail, with disastrous consequences. He later became special adviser to Labour's John Prescott (then responsible for transport) on the public-private partnership deal for London Underground, recently judged by the national audit office (NAO) not to have been very good value.

TWO MONTHS after *Eye* 1112 highlighted Leicester South by-election victor Parmjit Singh Gill's close links to the taxi trade, those links have landed him in trouble.

Leicester city council has submitted a complaint to the Standards Board for England after the tyro Lib-Dem MP, who is also a city councillor, allegedly "bullied and intimidated" two female officers trying to carry out random safety checks on cabs. Gill turned up at a testing centre on the evening of Friday 1 October after a driver appealed to him to prevent his cab being taken off the road.

The MP and a taxi union rep – Parmjit's uncle, Sital Singh Gill – intemperately demanded that the licensing officer should allow the cabbie to continue driving over the lucrative weekend. The driver was allowed back on the road, on condition his car was put in for repairs on the following Monday. Gill subsequently backed city centre protests by drivers who argued that random checks on busy Fridays and Saturdays were "unfair". Neither Gill nor the drivers mentioned that four of the 40 cabs inspected on the night of his bust-up were taken off the road for dodgy brakes and faulty steering columns.

Number **crunching**

£43,000

■ Housing and travel costs claimed in three years by Tony Blair which the *Daily Mail* thinks outrageous

£250,000

■ 'Benefits in kind' paid to *Daily Mail* editor Paul Dacre in three years for housing and travel costs

£178,000

■ Prime minister's salary

£815,000

■ *Daily Mail* editor's salary (excluding £899,000 bonus)

WEIGHTWATCH

Nicholas Soames MP

IT'S never easy riding two horses at once, especially if you are as ungainly as Nicholas "Fatty" Soames MP. Yet the Bunteresque Tory is doing his best.

As MP for Mid-Sussex, Fatty has long campaigned against the government's targets for housing development in the area. In March he warned that the plans "will strip local communities of their say, bulldoze green spaces and put areas like Sussex at risk of being covered in concrete". His constituency newsletter for Spring 2004 was headed "Soames hits out as report threatens 'yet more houses'." Mid-Sussex, he said, "is already faced with massive housebuilding that is simply not sustainable".

As *Eye* readers will recall, however, Soames is also chairman of the Framlington Second Dual Trust plc, which holds significant shareholdings in three housebuilders: Persimmon, Crest Nicholson and Berkeley. Persimmon will shortly be applying for a high court judicial review of a decision to block it from building 2,700 new homes on a greenfield site adjacent to Gatwick airport. If the development gets the go-ahead, Soames's investment trust will reap the rewards of Persimmon's good fortune.

Crest Nicholson is also very active in Soames country. The 7 October edition of the *Mid-Sussex Times* had no fewer than three separate stories about planned developments. One, a 90-home proposal at Burgess Hill – in the heart of Fatty's constituency – has provoked 75 letters of opposition, mostly complaining that there aren't enough roads, shops, sewers, school places or NHS facilities in the area to sustain it. Crest Nicholson is also set to benefit from the building of a new ring-road in Haywards Heath, which will enable the district council to grant planning permission for a development on the old St Francis Hospital site and indeed the site currently occupied by the council itself in the town centre. As the newspaper reported: "Crest Nicholson is the main contender to acquire the land."

Finally, the *Mid-Sussex Times* notes that Crest Nicholson has applied to the council to build a further 800 homes "on marshland between Bolnore village and Ashenground Woods". Given the severe flooding in the area a few years ago, this marshland may not be the wisest place to build new houses. Besides, it is also a "greenfield" rather than "brownfield" development.

Fatty's views on this seem clear enough. "We need more affordable housing," he said earlier this year, "but we should focus on regenerating urban areas and brownfield land." Any further housebuilding in Sussex would encroach on "greenfield and greenbelt land... and lead to the loss of irreplaceable green fields and open spaces".

A headline in the *Mid-Sussex Times* on 7 October ("Development: My worst fears have come true – Soames") implies that this is still his opinion. But closer scrutiny of the story reveals no mention of the need to preserve greenfield land. Nor, it seems, is Soames actually opposed to housebuilding in his constituency: he simply wants John Prescott to commit millions of pounds to improving the "infrastructure" of Sussex so that such housebuilding will be a more viable proposition – thus swelling the profits of Crest Nicholson and other developers, and gladdening the hearts of investors in the Framlington Second Dual Trust plc.

One area that we have failed to succeed in so far is toilets on trains. This continues to be a major weakness and a great frustration for passengers and staff alike. The good news is that I think we have now bottomed out what the real problems are

South Eastern Trains newsletter

Number
3,000 ■ Number of civil service jobs axed at Department for Work and Pensions to save money
£300,000,000
■ 'Sum spent on external consultants by Department for Work and Pensions in a year

crunching



BRUSSELS SPROUTS

SOME of the European commissioners who sat in closed session to sack Marta Andreasen (see *Eyes passim*) must be hoping the public will quickly forget about the woman who blew the whistle on the European Union's deeply flawed accounting system.



They must realise how embarrassing it would be for their political futures if their decision to sack Mrs Andreasen were to come back to haunt them when other financial scandals, like the Eurostat affair, finally emerge from the woodwork.

It was back in 2002 that Mrs Andreasen, a newly-appointed chief financial officer, committed the heinous crime of telling the world (when her bosses wouldn't listen) that the EU had no proper financial control over its £60bn budget, which was wide open to fraud. It was for speaking out publicly that she finally got the boot; for going public is against commission staff rules.

The commission decision to sack her went through as something called an A-point: ie, it wasn't discussed by the commissioners at the crucial meeting. Michael Mann, a commission spokesman, said any discussions would have taken place over previous weeks within the commissioners' cabinets. According to Mann, there was no dispute within the commission about the sacking.

If there was lack of transparency before Mrs Andreasen was formally booted out, there is now a complete clampdown. Not a single commissioner, says Mann, has made a statement that would imply dissent. Moreover, calls to the offices of individual commissioners were generally not returned after the name "Andreasen" was mentioned – not even by Estonian Siim Kallas, a vice-president for administrative affairs in the new commission, who has been feted as Neil Kinnock's successor as Mr "Clean-up". Margot Wallström, the former environment commissioner who is taking over communication strategy in the next commission, didn't want to communicate on the matter either.

Down On The Farm

DR JANET Maughan, a dairy farmer who also works at Manchester Metropolitan University, decided to buy a steak from Tesco, via the internet. She clicked on one which had the "Little Red Tractor" prominently displayed, along with a Union Jack, assuming this guaranteed her steak was British. When it arrived, however, she was incensed to find that the label read "Fresh Argentinian Sirloin Steak".



Dr Maughan then learnt that Tesco has close links with the Argentinian beef industry, not least because the chairman of one of its main meat suppliers, St Merryn, has recently acquired a controlling interest in a large Argentinian beef processing firm. More incensed than ever, Dr Maughan wrote to Tesco demanding to know why her Argentinian steak had carried the "Little Red Tractor" and the Union Jack. The "customer services manager" immediately replied, promising to refund the £11.30 she had paid, but offering no further explanation.

What Dr Maughan didn't realise, although as a farmer she perhaps should have done, is that she had become yet another victim of a European Union scam. One of the "benefits" of belonging to the EU is that we have handed over all power to make laws about food labelling to Brussels. And a key principle behind those laws is that food labelling must not discriminate between one country and another in terms of where food actually originated. All that matters is where it is processed and packaged. So if, say, chickens are imported from Thailand or beef from Argentina, so long as they are then processed and wrapped in Britain, it is perfectly legal to put a Union Jack on the label to fool shoppers into thinking they are buying British-produced food, when in fact the only British component in the product is the plastic it is wrapped in.

This seemed so mad that, some years back, various attempts were made to get some truth and logic back into the situation. One was the NFU's so-called "Little Red Tractor" scheme, whereby food could be labelled with a little red tractor and even a Union Jack, so long as it conformed with something called "the British Farm Standard". The idea was that shoppers would thus get the impression that the food was British, without the label actually having to say so, which would be illegal. But in reality there is nothing to stop importers putting the tractor on Argentinian beef, so long as the exporter can guarantee that his meat complies with "British Farm Standard" requirements. If you look up "questions and answers" about the Red Tractor scheme on the NFU website, the one question which isn't asked is "Does this label guarantee that the food originated in Britain?" – because a truthful answer would give the game away.

Someone else who got incensed about this was Tory MP Stephen O'Brien, who four years ago introduced a bill in the House of Commons which would have made it legal, if food was produced in Britain, to label it accordingly. Every speaker agreed, until the minister, Joyce Quin, had to explain in lofty fashion that under EU law this would not be permitted. For Mr O'Brien's proposal to be allowed to continue would be "an abuse of parliamentary process". So, four years later, millions of unsuspecting shoppers like Dr Maughan continue to be fooled. But at least she got her money back.

'Muckspreader'

- Helen Jackson
MP Sheffield Hillsborough
Helen Jackson works aimlessly for the Disabled and Elderly markets.

Special Needs Conference programme note

AME

Strictly Come Dancing (BBC1)

Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two (BBC2)

IT'S some years now since television produced a hot new format: recent hits (*I'm A Celebrity...; How Clean is Your House?*) have tended to be variations on genres (*Big Brother, What Not To Wear*) established several seasons back. So *Strictly Come Dancing* is noteworthy for being the one completely unexpected success of the 2004 schedules.

Admittedly it isn't entirely an original project, deriving from the old-fashioned and long-abandoned series *Come Dancing*; but it has been rethought considerably more than other current retro-productions such as *Mastermind* and *Doctor Who*.

In effect the old twinkly-toes show featuring professional ballroom-dancers has been crossed with the currently-fashionable celebrity-challenge programmes: ten mainly B-minus list stars (including Esther Rantzen, Diarmuid Gavin, Roger Black and Carol Vorderman) are paired with professional dance teachers.

The first series earlier this year was significant for continu-

ing the career revival of Bruce Forsyth and for attracting tabloid attention because the winner (news anchorette Natasha Kaplinsky) seemed to be spending more time than rehearsal strictly demanded with her handsome coach. Such were the ratings and publicity generated that there was bound to be a second series; but Saturday's opening show suggested that the latest hit franchise is already in trouble.

The difficulties began with the presentation: during series one, Brucie had a little trouble reading the autocue but was otherwise smooth. This time, he began with a performance so uncertain that, if the audience-participation element of the show extended to the hosts, he would have been voted off at once.

Introducing Diarmuid Gavin, an early contestant, Brucie joked that "until last week, he thought that cha-cha-cha and rumba was an order for tea and cake." There was silence from the studio audience, probably because the puns depend on a time when char was a popular euphemism for tea and rum baba was a frequent piece of patisserie. Since easy familiarity with both words puts you well beyond the age at which people retired until Gordon Brown raided the pension funds, there was always likely to be a puzzled reaction outside the TV lounges of rest-homes.

This humourlessness seemed to extend to the contestants. When one of the judges (all dull Simon Cowell-wannabes) complained that Julian Clary was "too stiff below the waist", he seemed to take it as a serious note without even a tremor of innuendo. Diarmuid Gavin and Quentin Willson, while not actually cracking gags, made the

mistake of treating the show as a joke (Willson danced with an L-plate on his back), an approach which has consistently been shown to fail in reality game-show.

Only Esther Rantzen seemed to understand the necessary tactics. Since an appearance on BBC2's *Celebrity Would Like To Meet*, Saint Esther has been cannily reinventing herself as a sex-crazed widow and she continued the shtick of an oldster desperate for her oats in this show, rubbing and blushing against her instructor as she turned a waltz into dirty dancing. This is a trick she learned from Kaplinsky, who is co-hosting this series in the absence on maternity leave of last time's second banana, Tess Daly.

Even so, speculation over whether Esther is getting her leg over the dance-coach won't play in the tabloids as well as Ms Kaplinsky's alleged horizontal practice last time and the whole show felt dangerously unsure of its tone this time round. When the judges got really vicious (surely one attraction to the audience), Bruce nervously explained that they are "only giving their professional opinion", then embarrassingly asked Quentin Willson's watching young son if he was proud of his dad.

The BBC's pride – or relief – about this series is so high that this run comes with a nightly half-hour behind-the-scenes series on BBC2: *Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two*. The evidence of the second series so far is that, as often happens with hit formats, but most appropriately with this one, over-enthusiasm has led the producers to trip over their own feet.

'Remote Controller'

Steve Wright's *Big Quiz*, Radio 2

Wright: In which British country would you find the town of Merthyr Tydfil?

Contestant: Kent.

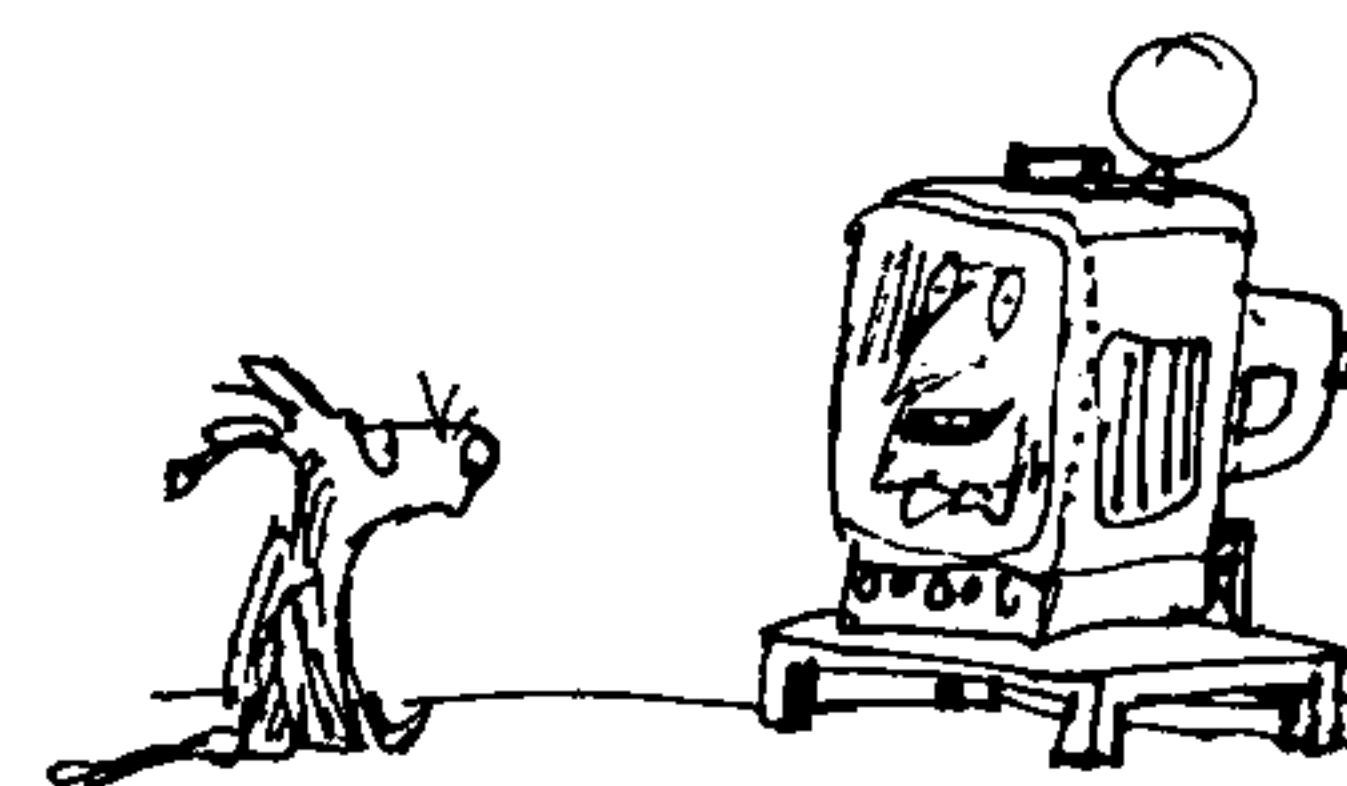
Magic 52 (north-east England)

Presenter: In what year was president Kennedy assassinated?

Contestant: Erm.

Presenter: Well, let's put it this way: he didn't see 1964.

Contestant: 1965?



MEDIA NEWS

NO SOONER has the BBC's niche market digital television output been lambasted (yoof on BBC Three, egg-heads on BBC Four) in a government report than along comes a similarly independent review of the Beeb's digital radio channels – and radio fares no better.

The BBC Asian Network, for example, designed to appeal to an absurdly specific core audience, a "young Asian male aged 28", is criticised because "the audience that seems to identify least with the network is young Asian males".

Similarly 1Xtra, created to appeal to "young Black listeners" is chastised because only 18 percent of them bother to listen. There will, of course, be an internal review of the review to find out why nobody is listening. The "hideously white" colour of the commissioning editors will no doubt be raised again – as will their refusal to realise the shocking truth that Asian and black listeners actually want to listen to the same sort of programmes as everyone else does, rather than being shoved into a pointless ghetto in the name of "diversity".

The predominantly ethnic staff who work on these channels know this only too well. Listeners complain about their poor skills: "The BBC accepts that the Asian Network will always have a relatively inexperienced team, as people will always want to move on to more prominent BBC services" – more "prominent" because they appeal to a broader audience, of course.

PRODUCERS of *Vote For Me*, ITV's political *Pop Idol* which will select an independent candidate to stand in the next general election, made good on their promises that it will be a "serious and credible contribution to addressing the democratic deficit" by announcing last week that they have recruited ex-*Sun* editor Kelvin Mackenzie as a judge.

Those who doubt that the show will be a realistic reflection of the democratic process can take heart, however: the production of *Vote For Me* appears to be exactly following standard Whitehall practice. It was commissioned from Mentorn last April by ITV's head of current affairs, Steve Anderson (previously most famous for awarding the contract to produce the network's flagship current affairs programme, *Tonight*, to his brother Jeff). Anderson has since quit ITV and moved to a new job as creative director of Mentorn, where he will serve as executive producer of... *Vote For Me!*

DUMB BRITAIN

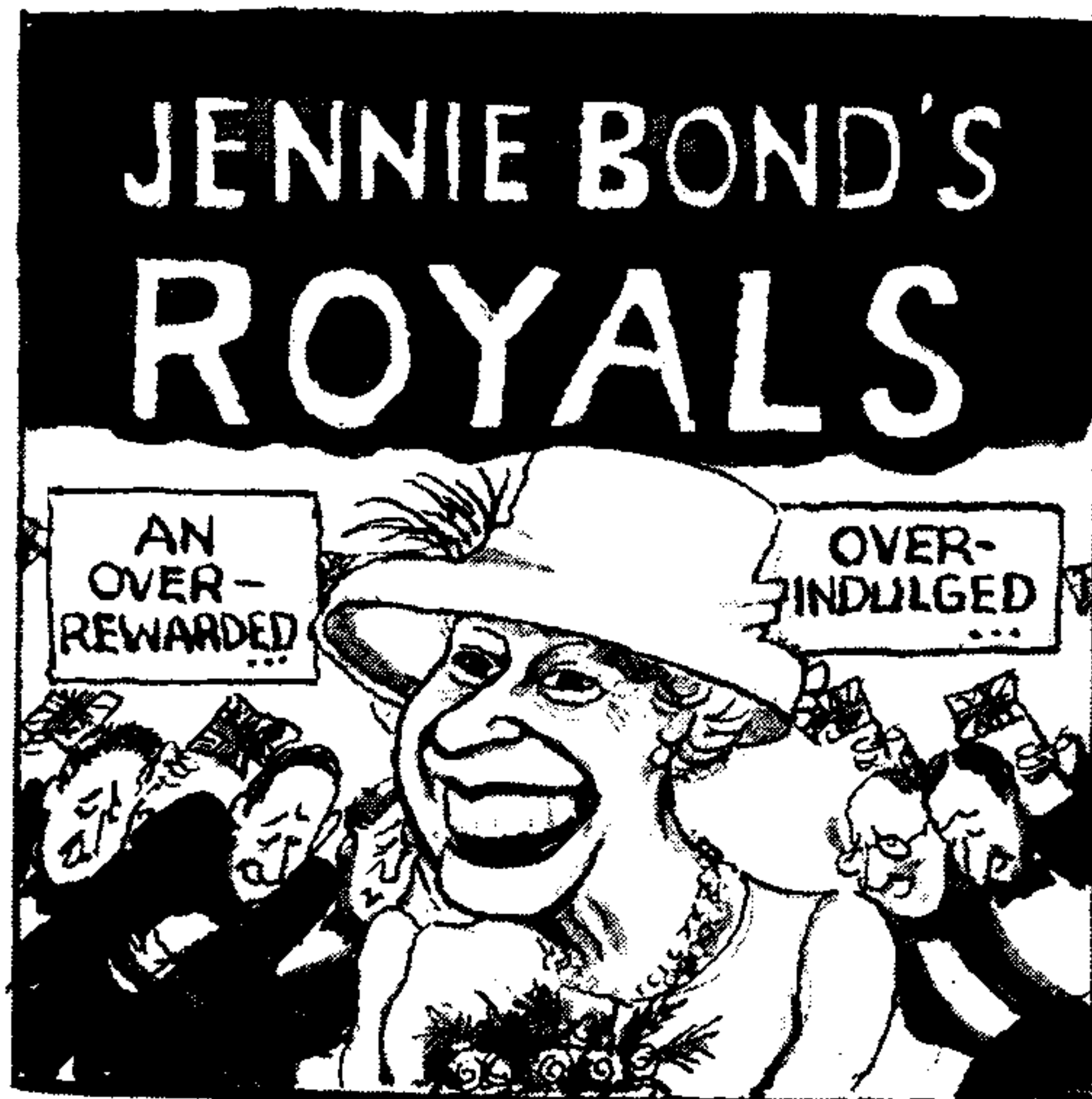
The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: According to the proverb, the daily consumption of what piece of fruit keeps the doctor away?

Contestant: Banana.

Robinson: In which of the UK countries are the Forth road and rail bridges situated?

Contestant: Er... Cardiff?



THE BBC was contrite over the censuring of football commentator Alan Green by Ofcom for suggesting that a Cameroonian player might have been saying "me no cheat" to a referee.

BBC Five Live accepted that "the suggestion that a black player was incapable of speaking grammatical English was inappropriate, particularly given the drive to eradicate racist attitudes in football", and pointed out that Green has "a well known track record in campaigning against racism".

Indeed he has – credentials he demonstrated as recently as last October, when he referred during a live commentary to Manchester City player Sun Jihai as "number 17 – that will be the Chicken Chow Mein."

I - S K Y

"Telly chiefs have ordered a replay of soccer reality show *The Match* – with Robbie Williams set to don his boots. Chart king Robbie, 30, revealed he would play after watching pal Jonathan Wilkes skipper a Celebrity side who took on a team of footie legends on Sunday night. Robbie, right, joined more than 50,000 fans at Newcastle's St James' Park to see the game – viewed by nearly two million on Sky One...

"Sky bosses also hope to persuade rocker Rod Stewart to take part. A Sky spokesman said: '*The Match* was a huge success. We're delighted to announce there'll be a second series. The next one will be even bigger and better.'"

– "News" item in the *Sun*, page 3, 12 October.

HOLLYWOOD KNIGHT

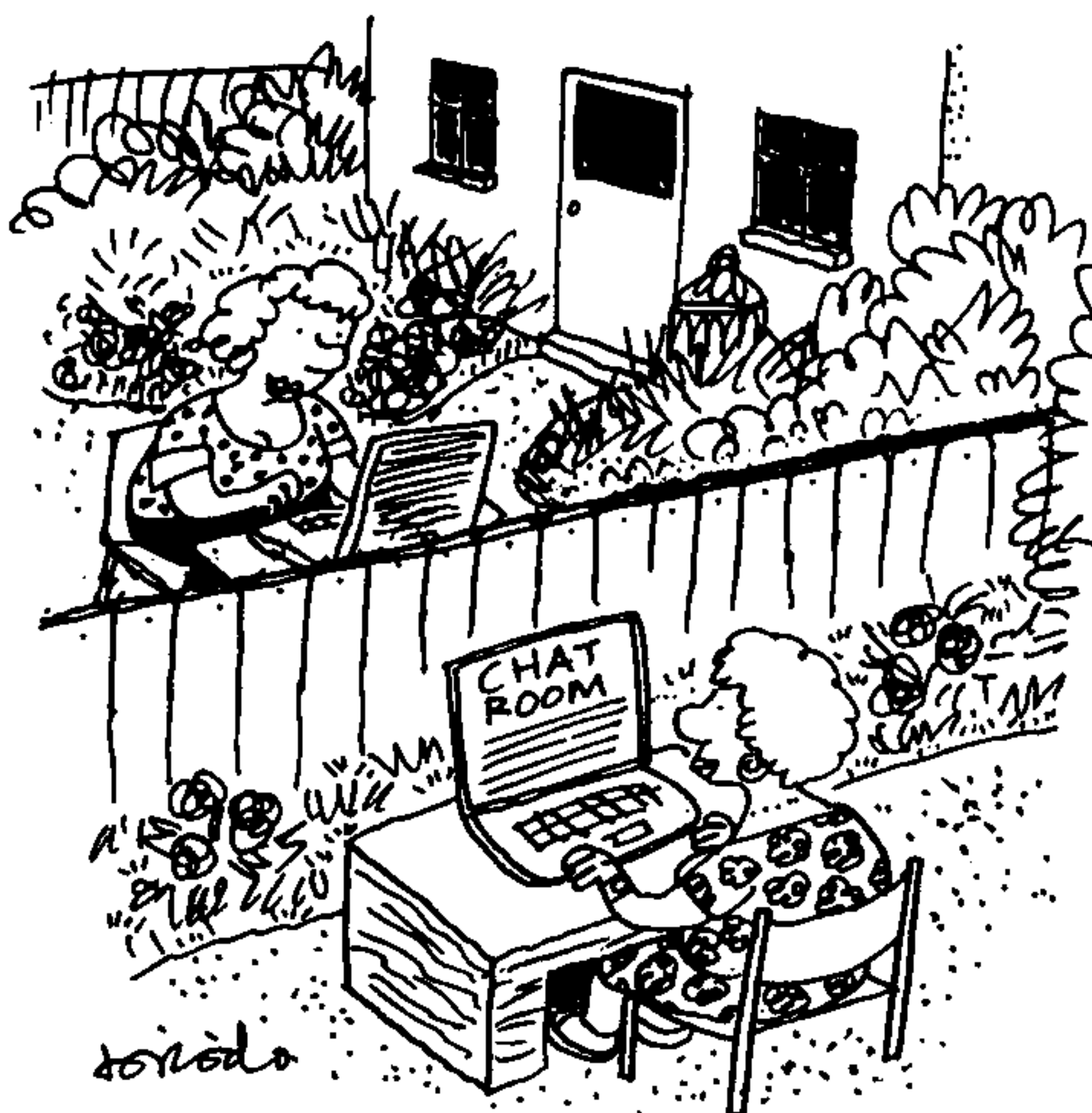
LORD Attenborough, Barbara Broccoli and other luminaries gathered at 11 Downing Street last month to hear arts minister Estelle Morris boast of the government's commitment to a flourishing British film industry "that will go on producing award-winners like Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake*".

Also present was Sir Alan Parker, who until August was chairman of the UK Film Council. Yet Parker's main achievement in his term of office was to have as many American movies as possible reclassified as British, so that his beloved Hollywood studios could benefit from the tax advantages of "UK film" status. And who has now replaced Parker as the champion of British cinema? Step forward Stewart Till, chairman and chief executive of UIP, the biggest film distributor in the world – which is owned by the Hollywood studios.

A few years ago major British and European film-makers testified to the European Commission that UIP ought to be broken up since it used its monopoly power to keep local product out of the cinemas. Needless to say the EU did nothing, and today UIP is bigger and stronger still. Who better, then, to determine policy and distribute public money on behalf of the UK film industry than a man with a fiduciary duty to shareholders in California?

Till's – and the UKFC's – first task is to assist the mighty Disney Corp, which has let it be known it might consider shooting *Pirates of the Caribbean II* in "British" film territory. The lure of UK status is that it gives them access to lottery cash and lucrative giveaways – tax breaks which were supported by the Iron Chancellor to ensure genuine British films got made.

For *Pirates II*, Disney requires not a set at Pinewood but an actual Caribbean island. So the UK Film Council is now urgently scouring the West Indies for an island willing to sign a "coproduction agreement" with Britain. And why were these coproduction agreements introduced in the first place? To protect what's left of the national film industry from, er, Hollywood predators.



GOING LIVE

WHEN BBC News 24 went live to James Harvey for the latest on the publication of MPs' expenses, it was less than revealing.

"Is there a headline here?" asked Chris Eakin in the studio.

"Not yet. We're still looking at the details here," replied Harvey.

AD NAUSEAM



THIS column was delighted to see adland's legendary lifestyle commando Mark Wnek making yet another comeback in the *Independent's* new media section.

"Wnek-er", readers will recall, has had plenty of time on his hands since he left agency Euro RSCG last year to set up his own venture only to find that his partner, Ben Langdon, had walked out on him – to take Wnek's old job at Euro RSCG (*Eye* 1104).

While Wnek's wisdom is doubtless much appreciated by everyone in the business (topics so far have included such bolts from the blue as Traditional TV Advertising is on the Wane and Creatives Hate Suits) you might wonder why a man who made such a hash of his own start-up would be gifted a column in a national newspaper. In an unconnected matter Simon Kelner, editor of the *Independent*, is godfather to Wnek's son.

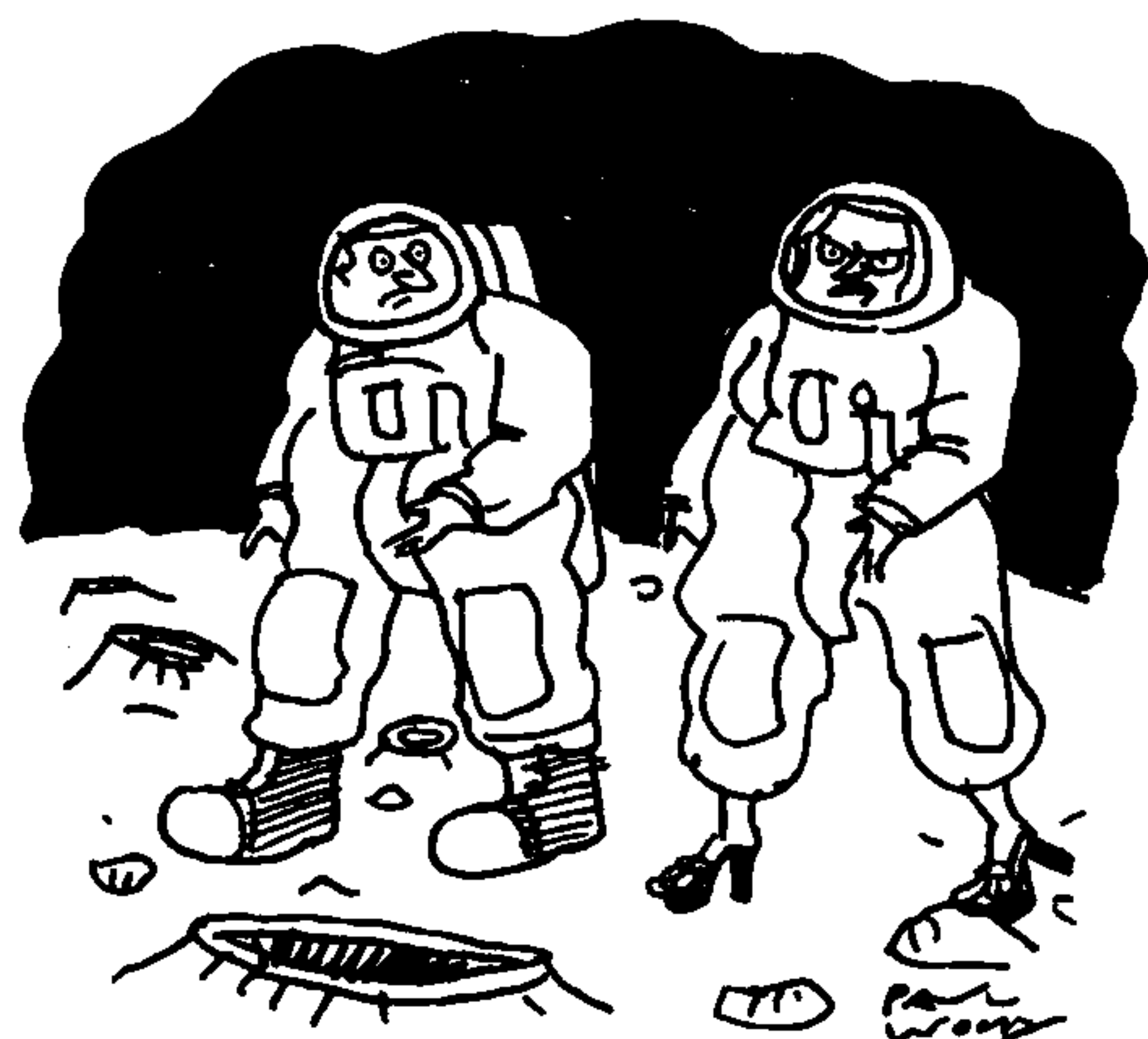
Still, however he came by it Wnek has grasped the opportunity with both hands. From day one he has been schmoozing potential employers with the kind of charm and finesse that few recall from his agency days, including extensive arshlikan of TBWA, Mother, Clemmow Hornby Inge, HHCL and BBH. Ironically, last week's musings contained a section entitled "Product placement, the coolest way to sell." In this case Wnek himself is the product and the *Independent* is his stealth shop-window. It's what's known as "doing a Platell".

NORWICH UNION has been berated over adverts promoting private health insurance.

The Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS trust condemned ads that claimed the trust had a 399-day waiting time for cataract operations and said "delays possible at Royal Cornwall Hospital. Take alternative Route".

An enraged trust complained that the figures exaggerated waiting lists by 100 days. Norwich Union's spin doctor Lorna Wiltshire said the firm apologised for any offence, emphasising that the adverts were a pilot campaign running in three areas and no other trust had complained.

Whoops! Two days earlier the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS trust had attacked the same advertising campaign. The Norwich had urged patients to go private because the Shrewsbury trust made patients wait 487 days for hip replacements. The hospital does not do hip replacements.



"Damn! I knew it was a mistake to bring these shoes!"

TONBRIDGE

Addiction centre date

An addiction centre planned for the centre of town will open early after a £30,000 injection boosted the project.

Kent and Sussex Courier

crunching	Number
	£400,000
■	Operating loss of <i>Daily Express'</i> publishers last year
crunching	£40,000,000
	■ Total pay packet of <i>Daily Express'</i> publisher Richard Desmond last year

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



DOING THE ROUNDS

How much information do you want to know before your operation? A Kent GP has sent in an illuminating letter from a neurosurgeon at his nearest teaching hospital.

"I reviewed this 68 lady in outpatients today. She has been having low back pain and right leg sciatica for about two years... I have offered her an L4/L5 discectomy. I have told her that the risks include, but are not limited to, complications of anaesthesia, bleeding, infection, development of neurological deficit for example weakness and numbness of legs, problems with bladder or bowels, CSF leak, no improvement in current signs and symptoms, worsening of present signs and symptoms, death and other seen and unforeseen complications. She understands and wishes to proceed..."

With litigation at an all-time high, this defensive approach to consent is entirely understandable is precisely what the General Medical Council orders: "Doctors must respect the right of patients to be fully involved in decisions about their care, and the risks and benefits of individual procedures."

Alas, patients don't always want to be fully involved. When a relative of mine had a heart attack, he was offered not only a clot-busting injection but a comprehensive list of potential side-effects: nausea, vomiting, bleeding, back pain, re-perfusion arrhythmia, intra-cerebral haemorrhage, rash, flushing, uveitis and Guillain-Barre syndrome. With the list came an estimated probability of each adverse event. After the pain and anxiety of a heart attack, and the sedation of a heroin injection, he was left utterly confused. But as the nurse put it: "I'm really sorry but we have to cover our backs."

M.D. sees lots of men over 50 inquiring about a PSA test for prostate cancer. Most doctors think PSA stands for "promoting stress and anxiety" because it's neither sensitive nor specific enough to be a useful screening test. But it's the only one we've got for a disease that kills 10,000 men a

year. Because the test isn't very good, and the proof that having treatment for prostate cancer improves the length or quality of your life is far from perfect, I give men a detailed discussion and an information leaflet (they can choose between a 1 page, 3 page or 5 page version) to enable them to understand the implications of testing. I then send them away for a week to think about it. But after all this effort and reflection, every patient asks: "What would you recommend, doctor?"

From where I'm sitting, "new" Labour's strategy of giving patients a choice of five different "providers" every time they're referred for hospital treatment seems impossible to deliver. Getting legally defensible consent for the figures of a single surgical team for a single procedure takes a good half hour – a comparative analysis of five centres would require a couple of hours and an understanding of statistics that most doctors don't have, let alone their patients. And at present, we don't have reliable enough information to even start the analysis. So patients will continue to select on ease of parking, waiting time or some meaningless star rating.

The questions you need answers for when considering any medical intervention are: how likely am I to die or be severely damaged by

having or not having each treatment? How likely is my quality of life to be improved by having, or not having, each treatment? The government should concentrate on accurately collecting and disseminating this information before it unleashes its ill-thought out choice programme.

"NEW" Labour is continuing its pre-election cull of quangos it set up at huge public expense. The Commission for Public and Patient Involvement died in under a year, and the Modernisation Agency is now being culled from 850 to less than 100 modernisers. However, the survivors will be full of the same guff as their predecessors.

Why not apply to become a "Blue Sky Practitioner" reporting to the "Blue Sky Lead" in the "New MA"? "The workstreams will work to a generic cycle based on a hypothesis driven, creative problem solving process to create improvement products..." You will "undertake horizon scanning and futures research... creating curve leverage systems for rapid diffusion... helping customers articulate and understand mess". Interested? The job is based in Leicester, with travel, and a salary of up to £65,000.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY



SIGNAL FAILURES

Crossed rails

"NEW" Labour at last seems to be giving ground on public-private partnerships for railways. That's not a response to the renationalisation vote at the party conference, nor to the soaring costs and permanently poor punctuality of private rail. What matters to Labour is London's bid for the 2012 Olympics.

London has needed the east-west Crossrail line for decades but successive governments gave it no real support. Having let Crossrail stew as futile attempts were made to organise private funding, Labour now realises that it's vital to London's Olympic credibility: cue an acceptance that it could be publicly funded after all. This is reminiscent of Labour's desperation to finish the

Jubilee Line extension in time for the millennium dome's opening. As the prospect of a publicly-funded Crossrail is to reassure Olympic officials, it could easily vanish if London's bid fails.

Meanwhile rail schemes that don't affect the Olympic bid stay in the bureaucratic sidings. They include the north-south Thameslink 2000 (sic) and, for other English cities, light-rail schemes blocked by transport secretary Alistair Darling because they're too expensive (*Eye* 1112).

Darling has yet to admit that the high costs stem from his insistence on cumbersome PFI deals. Darling and his civil servants just say no to high costs and no to sensible funding methods, without offering constructive advice or showing any enthusiasm for the projects. (These are the people who are soon meant to be sorting out the shambles on the rail network after abolishing the "strategic" rail authority.) The nearest thing to guidance they've given to cities plagued by traffic jams is a vague

reference to buses being more appropriate than rail.

Bus company FirstGroup has a new approach to try to make the government smile: a bendy bus shaped to fool the public into thinking it's a tram. This spindoctoring on wheels is for cities where local councils invest in bus ways and raised bus stops, instead of tram tracks and platforms. But it's unlikely to impress people in Manchester, where Darling has quashed expansion of the Metrolink system and where WorstGroup is famous for its appalling bus services. It's unclear how putting bulbous tram-style fronts on the buses would eradicate delays and cancellations.

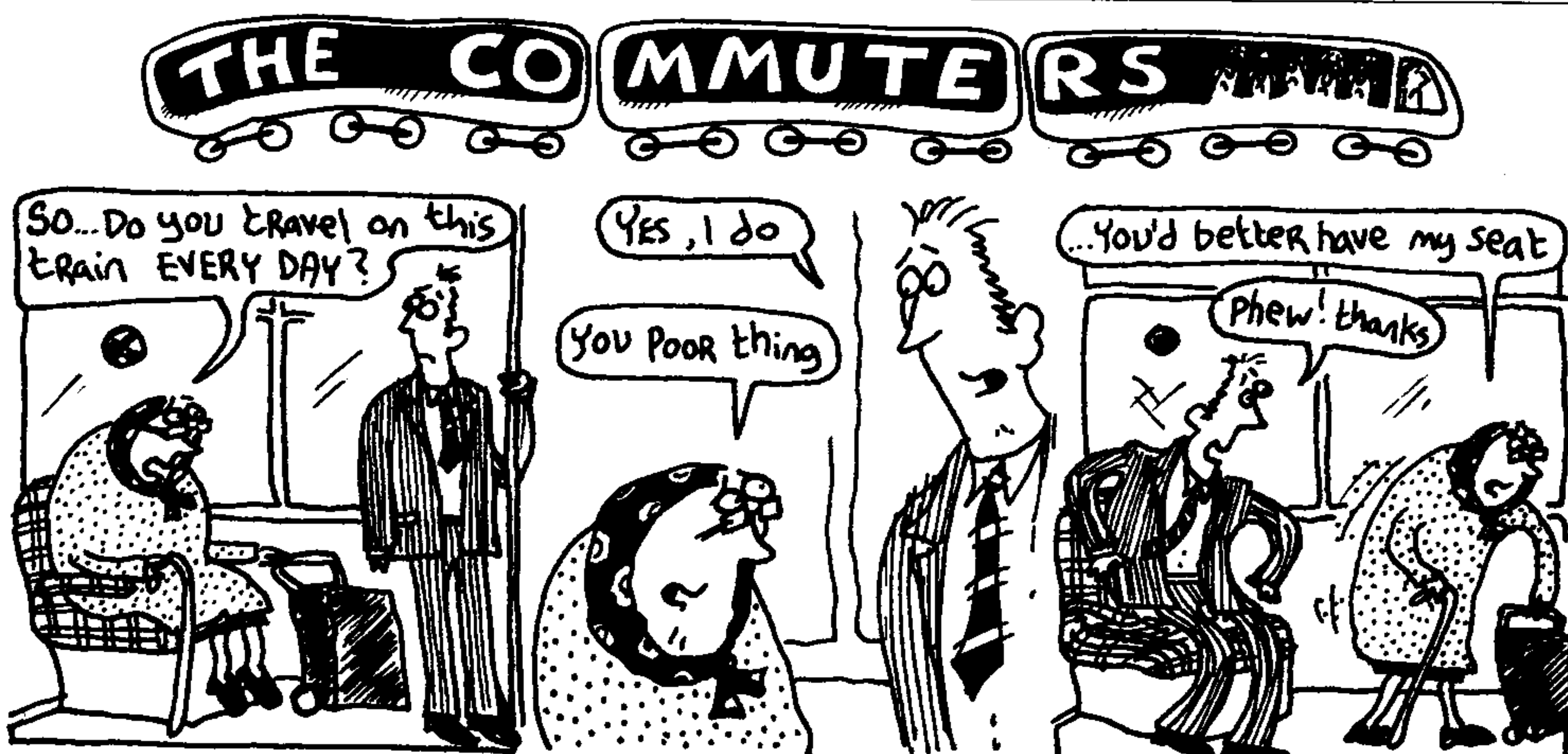
FirstGroup won't say how much this new approach would cost, but buses are always cheaper than light rail for many reasons.

Any company wanting to get involved in light rail has to take on a risky 30-year concession to build and operate the system; bus firms get their infrastructure on a plate and can walk away any time. Bus services are subsidised directly and indirectly in recognition of their benefits; trams are deemed pointless unless they'll run profitably. Trams are electric powered, using costly overhead wires, to improve air quality and public health; buses pour exhaust fumes into crowded streets. Unlike road schemes, light-rail projects include ransoms to utility companies for diverting underground pipes and cables. And tram systems come under the health and safety executive's rail regime, which puts them on a par with nuclear plants; bus firms have occasional spot checks by vehicle inspectors.

Interesting fact: Darling's wrecking policy hasn't blocked the light-rail scheme for central Edinburgh – constituency of one Alistair Darling MP.

'Dr B. Ching'

PS: That's a canny move by Leeds because Labour loves that financial model – as used for the Channel tunnel rail link, Virgin West Coast, Virgin Cross Country, Central Trains and many others.



■ ROTTEN BOROUGH ■

CRYING DAME

THE crown prosecution service is studying a file prepared by Inspector Knacker on whether "Dame" Shirley Porter should be charged with perjury and/or other offences in the aftermath of her attempts to avoid paying the £42m surcharge levied on her for gerrymandering Westminster council in the 1980s.

Among the facts the CPS will consider are these:

- In the period 1979-1994, Dame Shirley's name regularly appeared in "rich lists" which variously valued her fortune at between £62m and £90m. She never denied such estimates.
- In January 2002 she submitted a sworn statement to the high court to the effect that her total assets did not exceed £300,000.
- In May this year she agreed to pay Westminster council £12.3m in final settlement of the £42m surcharge.

Tough call for the CPS, isn't it?

● **JOBSWORTHS** at Bournemouth council have ruled that £2m was insufficient insurance for children being taught card tricks and doing origami with plastic scissors. The council had hired jester Jonathan Russell to run a "magic workshop" as part of a Halloween event in the town's Lower Gardens on 31 October. Mr Russell already pays £1,000 a year to insure his audiences and helpers against mishaps arising from his usual act, which includes fire juggling, tightrope walking and acrobatics. His insurance totals £14m, with a limit of £2m on any one incident. Days before the event, Bournemouth told Russell he would have to take out a different policy, which would have a £5m limit. The council-approved policy would not, however, have covered Russell's audiences at all for his more "dangerous" stunts, prompting him to observe: "This has far more to do with protecting Bournemouth council than it has with protecting the public." At the last minute the council agreed to underwrite the extra £3m itself, after Russell said that unless his own more comprehensive policy stayed in place the only thing he would be performing was a vanishing act.

WRITING ON THE WALLS

THREE years ago Sunderland's stock of 36,500 council houses was transferred to a new "not for profit" housing association, the Sunderland Housing Group (SHG), for the astonishingly cheap price of £6,273 per property.

The man who masterminded the transfer, city council housing director Peter Walls, went to work for SHG, as did all his staff. Mr Walls did rather well out of the move, seeing his salary rise from

around £70,000 at the council to £135,465 as chief executive of SHG. The job was not advertised. Walls's salary is a fabulous sum in the former home of shipbuilding, where the average wage is around £15,000 for what work there is in call centres, pubs and supermarkets.

But, like Jennifer Aniston in the L'Oreal ads, Walls insists "I'm worth it". In 2002 he told the *Guardian*: "If you ask me do I deserve what I earn? I would say 'yes'. I'm managing seven new businesses that have created £500m worth of borrowing, we're delivering a multimillion pound development programme and there are 14,000 staff."

Alas not everyone in Sunderland is as impressed with Mr Walls as he is with himself. Critics of SHG say the city's social housing stock is being decimated in favour of luxury developments at high prices. SHG's development arm, Pathway Homes, is advertising new three-bedroom houses at £196,000 – way beyond what most people in Sunderland consider "affordable", although within the reach of middle-class commuters from Newcastle.

SHG has pursued an aggressive policy of demolishing its old housing estates to build new properties. This has led to problems for former tenants, many now elderly, who exercised the "right to buy" their council houses in the 1980s and 1990s and have recently seen their value plummet. After their SHG tenant neighbours are moved out, the empty homes are often vandalised or torched by yobs and the residents who remain suffer increased crime and intimidation. There is little such people can do but accept offers from SHG that sometimes amount to much less than their home's former market value. If they try to hold on, SHG gets Sunderland council to issue compulsory purchase orders. Many are thereafter unable to get back on the property ladder and are forced to rent.

Peter Walls has proved very sensitive to criticism of SHG on a "scurrilous and defamatory" website run by locals (www.dadsplace.co.uk) and has retained m'learned friends in an attempt to have it shut down. The website is so popular among employees of SHG that Walls has declared viewing it on an office computer a sacking offence.

● **IT'S egg-on-face time** for the London borough of Southwark, which last week had to withdraw its attempted prosecution of black rights campaigner Raymond Stevenson for assault. Stevenson is the former owner of Imperial Gardens night club, forced to close after becoming the victim of a planning scam for which two council officers remain suspended and under police investigation, along with Labour councillor Tony "Wot's-in-it-for-me" Ritchie (*Eyes passim*).

Judge Anthony Bradbury strongly criticised the council for waiting until the day of the hearing to admit its case was unsafe, thus wasting more than £30,000 of council taxpayers' money and two days of the judge's time.

While some council "witnesses" of an alleged assault on the assistant borough solicitor agreed to sign statements prepared for them, few proved willing to face cross-examination. Collapse of flimsy case.

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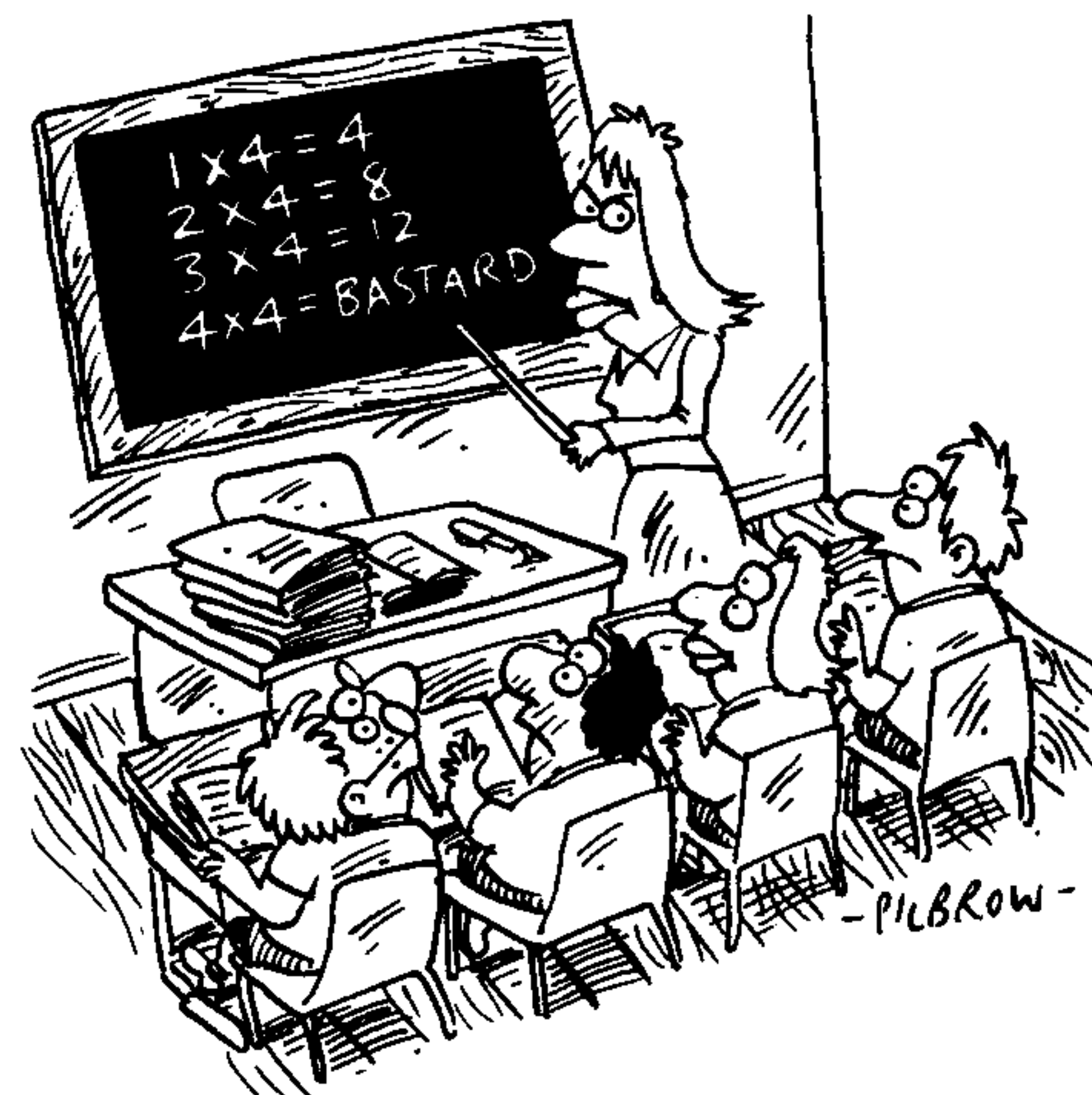
REMEMBER Haverstock School in Camden, where pupils were getting just one lesson a day at a local sports centre after PFI contractors were late with their new building (Eye 1115)? Construction firm Kajima has finally completed enough of the school for students and teachers to move in, but not everyone is chuffed with the result of the £21m investment.

A year 11 student writes: "The classrooms and corridors are very small, especially now the whole school have been crammed into one building. The school feels like a sauna in some places and an igloo in others, there is bad ventilation in most rooms, which is especially bad when you think the building is occupied by sweaty teenagers going through puberty."

WHEN troubled contractor Jarvis took over Northumberland Park Community School in Tottenham, north London, four years ago, all the site staff, including the swimming pool lifeguards, became Jarvis employees.

Now Jarvis is trying to bill the school £50,000 for lifeguard services, saying that if they are not paid, they will no longer permit the school to use what used to be its own pool. The firm, which has paid the pool staff for the past three years, now says it was never contracted to provide lifeguards, only to maintain the pool – which, of course, cannot function without lifeguards.

It'll certainly be a lot easier to maintain with no one allowed to swim in it.



THE Vardy Foundation's decision to withdraw from the deal to take over Doncaster's Conisbrough Northcliffe school was described in the press as a triumph for parent power over the Christian fundamentalists' plans to bring sweetness and light to the former mining area (Eye 1107). Not quite. Indeed, a "consultation" of parents produced a 60-40 majority in favour of Vardy.

The stumbling block was the teachers who were 99 percent against. Vardy wanted to fire most of them, provoking fears of mass sympathetic strike action throughout the borough. Even Doncaster mayor Martin Winter spotted the difficulties with that one.

Also problematic was Vardy's desire to remove a couple of dozen "undesirable" pupils, whose attendance records and pisspoor exam results were dragging the school down the league tables. Similar strategic exclusions in Vardy's Middlesbrough "academy" have improved that institution's standing. But neighbouring schools jibbed at becoming dustbins for Northcliffe's rejects. Donny education chiefs blinked, and so Vardy is taking God's message and £18m of government dosh to some other benighted spot. Donny's education supremo, Mark Eales, has been invited to peruse the job ads. Winter's reward will come at election time next year.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER



NOOKS and CORNERS

THE Colebrook School in Colebrook Row, Islington, is a handsome brick building of 1914 which stands in a conservation area. Its design is in the tradition of the architecture of the schools of the London School Board, those tall buildings in the new, eclectic and pretty "Queen Anne" style of the 1870s which Sherlock Holmes once described as "beacons", symbols of enlightenment and progress.

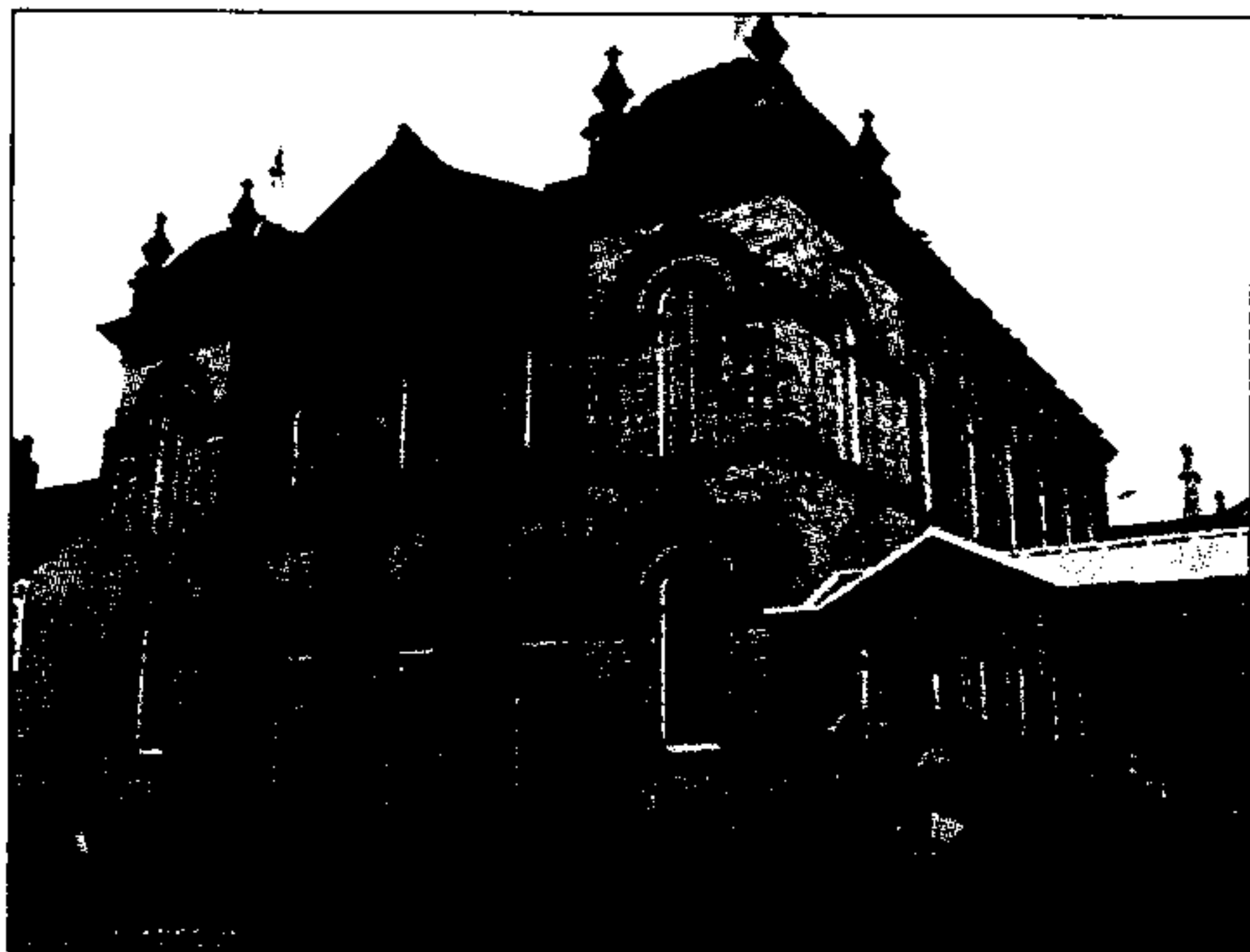
When redundant, these schools have proved eminently convertible to new uses, whether



residential or commercial. The Colebrook School is redundant and in good condition, but Islington borough council proposes to demolish it and sell the site to Laing

Homes as part of a deal involving four schools. A terrace of houses will replace the school.

How Islington council can justify this is hard to understand. The council needs money, of course, and attempts to excuse this vandalism by using some of the proceeds to build a special needs school. But as this new school is to be a floor of a multi-storey block of flats, that seems a rather inadequate justification. Besides, the government's guidance notes, PPG15, state that there must be an overriding community benefit to balance the loss of such a building, which is not the case in Colebrook Row.



THE Colebrook School is not a listed building but the Quay Methodist Chapel in Chapel Street, Bridlington, Yorkshire, certainly is (or was). Yet even that has not saved it from destruction.

The chapel, next to the Promenades shopping centre in the heart of town, was originally built in 1795 and grandly rebuilt in brick in 1873 when the facade was given a giant Corinthian order. Two weeks ago the east wall of the chapel began to move and the roof began to collapse. East Riding of Yorkshire council condemned the structure as dangerous



"I understand that the idea came to Foster in his bath"

and it was swiftly taken down, leaving – for the moment – only the fine facade standing forlorn.

But why was this listed building allowed to be so neglected that it could become so dangerous? The chapel was in use until 1999 when it closed and was bought by Dock Lane Properties, of London, who received planning permission in 2001 to convert it into (yes, like every redundant town centre building in Britain) a bar and restaurant with a food court.

But work never started and the chapel was left to rot. A spokesman for Dock Lane Properties remarked: "Now that the chapel has been partly demolished we will redesign the whole thing and I am sure we will come up with something which will work well in Bridlington." I am sure they will – after all, the poor old chapel stood on a prominent site in the commercial centre of the old Yorkshire seaside town.

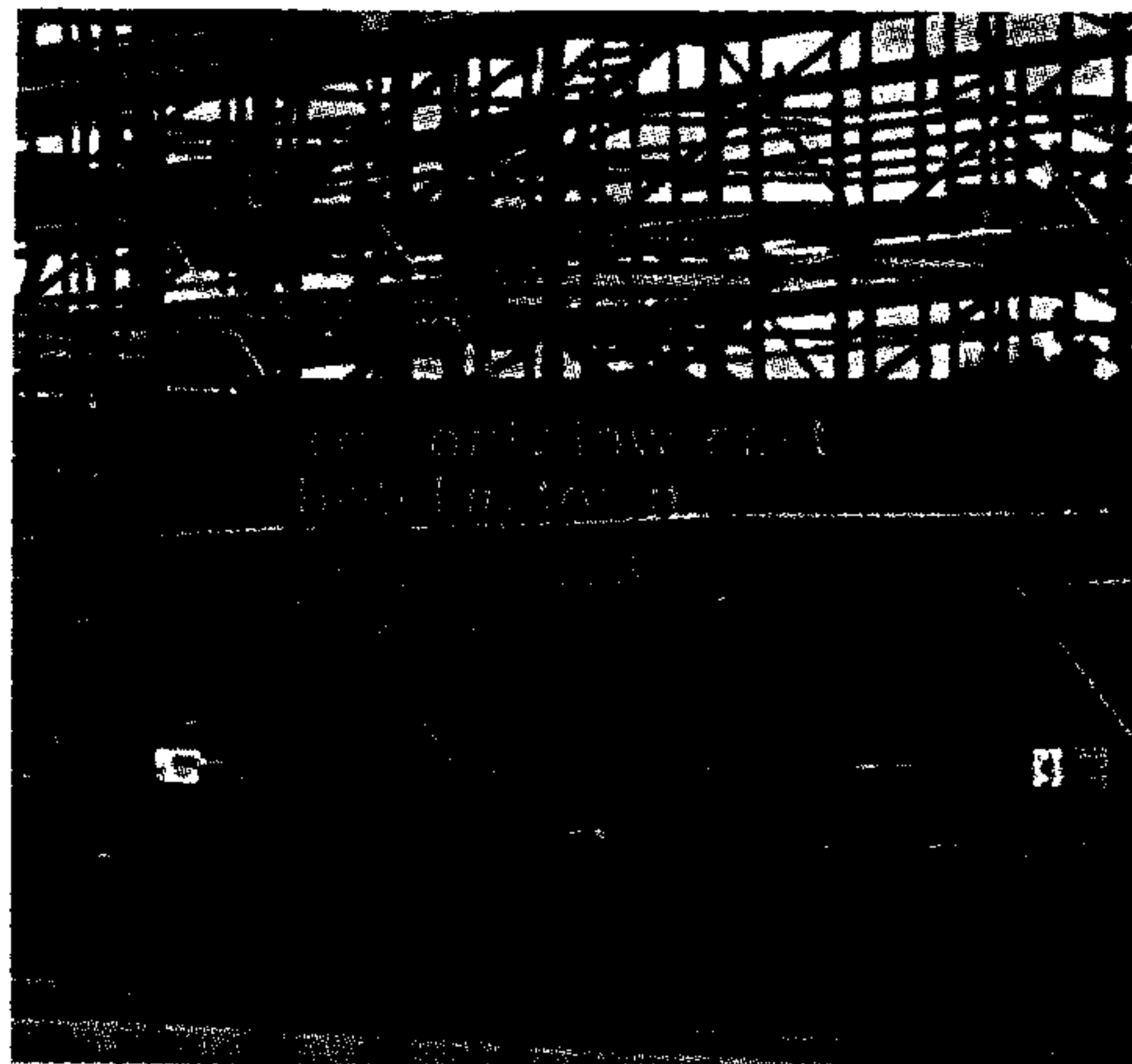
MORE ON the proposal to enlarge an existing school as a mosque in Mercatoria in St Leonards-on-Sea which Hastings borough council was anxious not to be seen to oppose despite the anxieties of local residents, the Burton St Leonards Society, English Heritage and the council's own conservation officers.

I suggested the problem was not so much the use of the building but the gross over-development of a confined site in an important conservation area (the planned development of St Leonards by Decimus Burton) combined with the utter mediocrity of the proposed design (by architects from Pakistan), and that the admirable cause of better cultural relations might be better served by respect for our planning laws and the employment of a decent architect.

The East Sussex Islamic Association has now submitted "detailed" plans for the mosque by a new architect, Messrs WAS Chartered Architects of St Leonards. Curiously the design seems almost identical to the last one. The same objections still apply.

'Piloti'

I-SPY Harlow, Essex



Submitted by Mike Meakin. £10 paid for similar submissions. (SAE required for return of photographs)

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WASN'T IT the White Queen in the Alice stories who managed to believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast? She should have been at the Royal Festival Hall for breakfast the other week.



There, a gathering of great and good largely distinguished by the size of their chequebooks, had been invited by Lord Hollick and Dame Vivien Duffield of the South Bank board to celebrate "a major milestone in the Festival Hall redevelopment campaign".

What this milestone was they didn't explain: the project has been dragging on for years and drags on still. But it soon became clear the real reason everyone was there chewing stale croissants to the din of a fortissimo brass band, was that redevelopment has fallen behind with its fundraising and needs another £15m in the next eight months.

Thus the indefatigable Dame Vivien gave a morale-boosting speech about how important it was for London to have a truly first-rank, state-of-the-art symphony hall to compare with the superbly renovated Carnegie in New York, the brand new Disney in Los Angeles, and others round about the world that kick London halls into oblivion. And she was right. London is shamed by the comparison.

But then she showed a video of what the "vision" for the new South Bank would be. And what was this vision? A politically correct farrago of multi-cultural rock-and-pop diversity that slipped symphony concerts (somewhat apologetically) into the mix but seemed largely to be about rapping schoolchildren in fancy-dress.

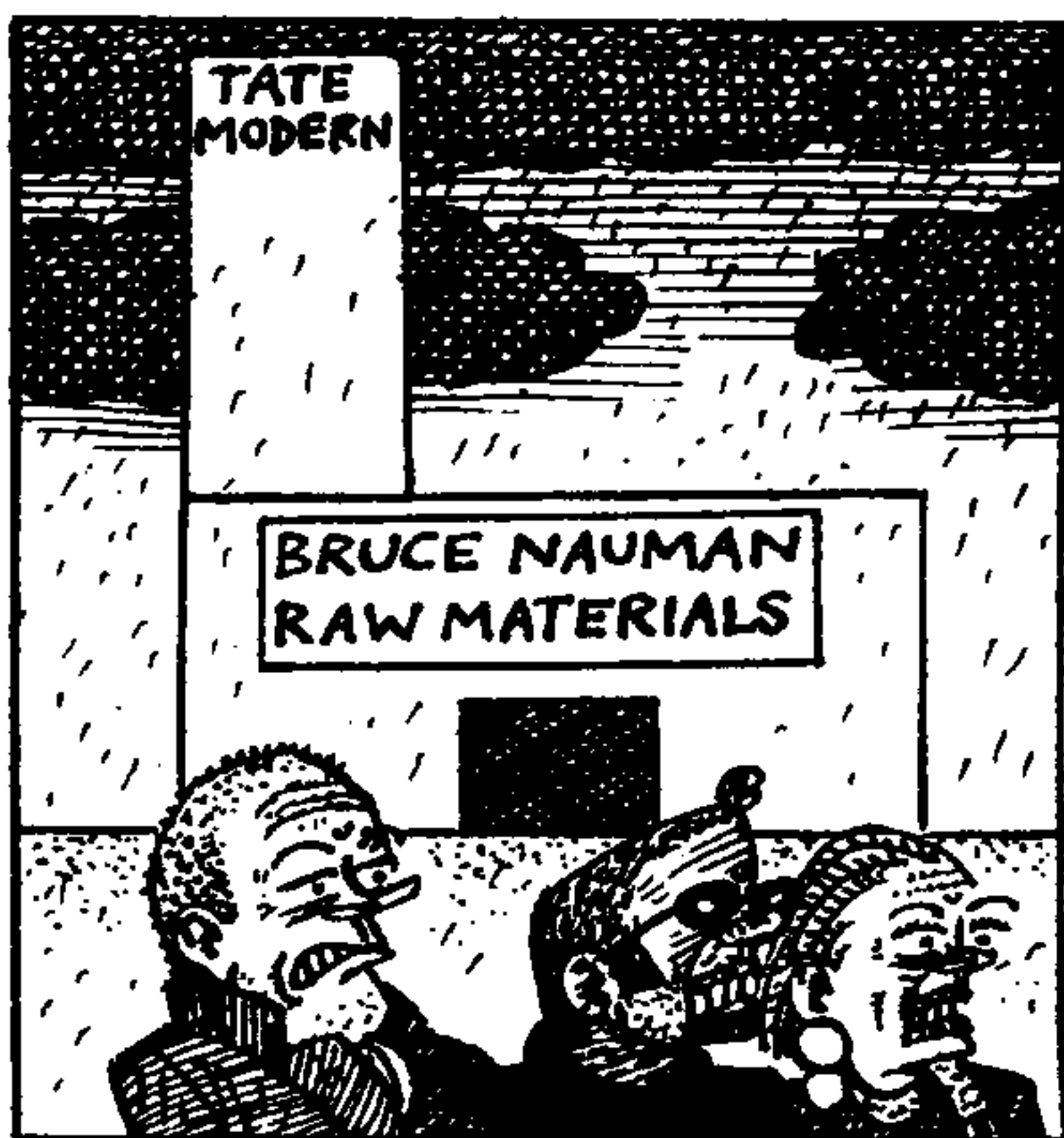
After this dismal show a senior South Bank officer admittedly privately that it perhaps got the emphasis wrong but an all-things-to-all people approach was important to attract a broad range of corporate donors who wouldn't necessarily be interested in giving to a "symphony" hall. Don't worry, said the officer. It will be a "Symphony" hall: the rapping kids were just packaging.

Whatever the truth, somebody is fibbing someone. Either the Festival Hall is to become a jamboree of rock and rap or the corporates who cough up the £15m will be paying for something they don't expect. The only sure thing is that it's impossible to get a clear answer from the South Bank as to what the programming policy of the redeveloped hall will be. When asked what percentage of events will be "symphonic" there are a lot of "ers" and "ums" and never-fulfilled promises to "Get back to you on that". The best anyone could offer at the breakfast was "somewhere between 50 percent and 60 percent". Which doesn't sound good.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH



An Audience with TONY BENN

Friday 22nd October - 8.00pm
Landmark Theatre • Ilfracombe

North Devon Theatres guide

SOCIAL SERVICE?

MORE on the baffling case of the troubled 14-year-old who, after six happy and successful years with foster parents whom he called Mum and Dad, was taken from their care by Sandwell Social Services and placed into an institution – against his express wishes.

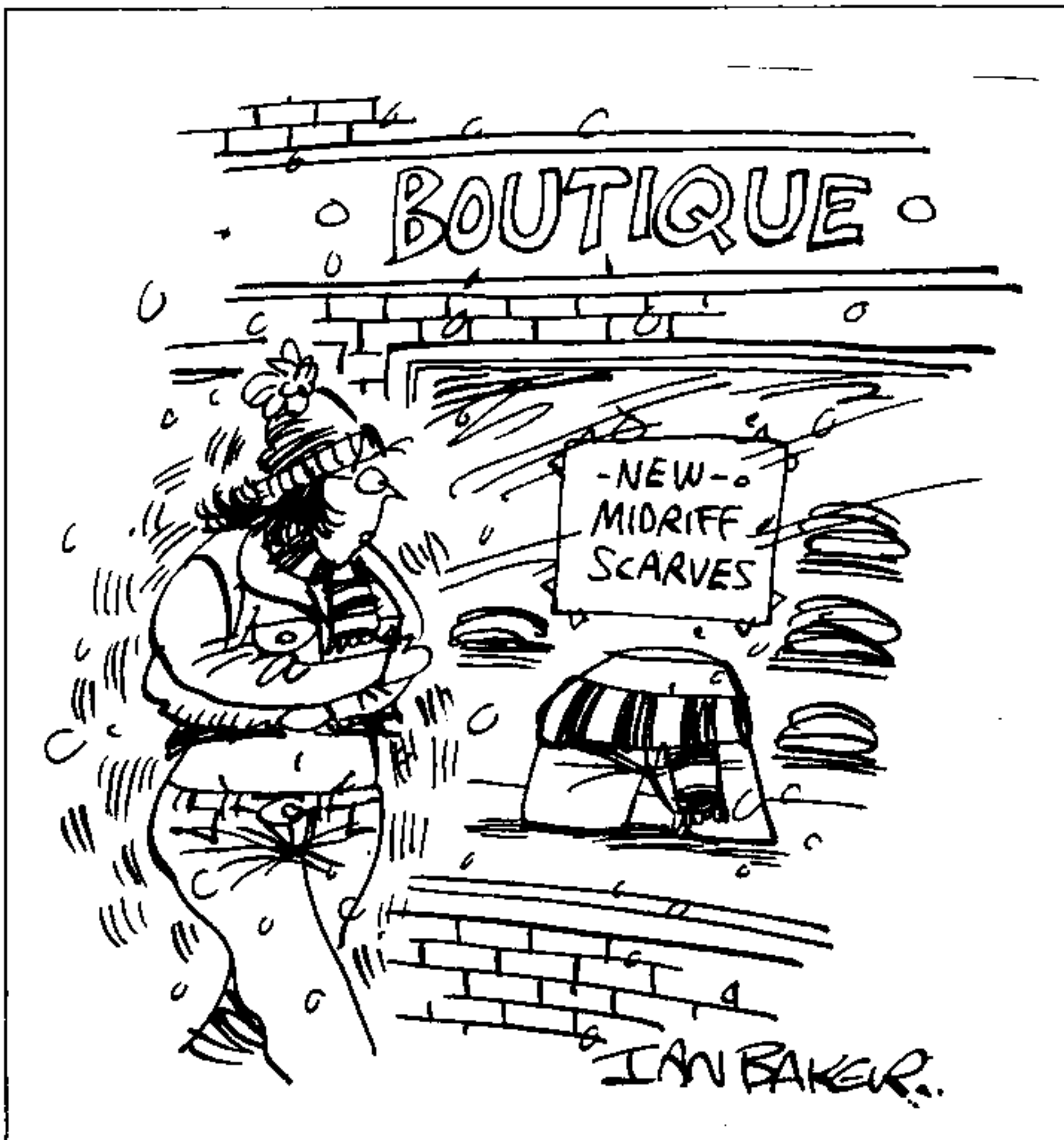
Readers will recall (see *Eye* 1116) how this happened in the very week that the family were being held up as ideal foster parents to encourage others in Britain to provide family homes for the 78,000 children in care.

The *Eye* has learnt that in the six weeks since being placed in a children's home, the child, who cannot be named, has tried to strangle himself. Last week, he was badly beaten by another child in the home in an incident which involved police.

The boy was removed from his foster family, not because of any concern about his health or welfare but because he often went on trips to South Africa because of his foster family's business interests there. Once, because of passport difficulties, he overstayed the permitted travel time limit. Rather than let him travel to South Africa again with the family, he was taken into institutional care. Social Services also banned the boy from having any contact with the family while they assessed whether South Africa could be considered as a primary residence.

Referring to the boy's recent problems in the children's home, the foster father, who has been fighting to take the child back into his care, tells the *Eye*: "None of this would have happened to 'P' if he had been left with us. He was removed in nasty circumstances. Initially we were denied all contact and now it is still extremely difficult. He has been harmed by the very state who have a duty to protect him and all we want to do is return him to the safe environment that he had enjoyed for years. How can social services claim this is in the best interests of the child?"

It's a good question – and one to which Sandwell social services says: "We can say categorically that any action we take in such situations takes full account of the best interests of the child, while fulfilling our legal obligations and responsibilities to the child and others involved." This is exactly what the same spokeswoman said before the boy was attacked and resorted to self-harm.



Letters

Private Eye

Balls

Sir,

What a nasty, grubby, disgusting and vicious cartoon about Brian Clough in the last issue. I have been buying *Private Eye* for over 20 years, and despite the fact that I never met the man and have no connection whatsoever with Nottingham or Derby, I will never ever buy your publication again!

Yours etc,
T. KAVANAGH,

Via email.

Cross words

Sir,

Just in case you thought nobody would notice or mind, I refer to the drawing on page 5 of issue 1117. In these anti-Christian times you might be excused for not thinking it blasphemous. As editor of a supposedly humorous magazine, however, you cannot be excused for thinking it was witty, or amusing from any aspect.

J. McMAHON,

Via email.

Sir,

Fantastic cartoon! 'Alternative History' Time to move on. Fantastic! Speaks volumes for the churchman we see in the media today. Christless Christianity! Excellent. Congrats to the cartoonist. Very good.

GRAHAM HERRIOTT,

Via email.

Kaiser cover

Sir,

Re the exposure of the Kaiser-influenced BMJ research paper (*In The Back, Eye* 1117). I lived in the USA until recently and at one point tried to enrol with Kaiser for a slightly lower premium than I was paying for the health insurance I had. The question of US health insurance premiums aside (humungous), even if Kaiser were by any measurement more efficient than the NHS, I was refused cover on the grounds of an undiagnosed pre-existing medical condition (no longer giving me any trouble) which I was foolish enough to mention on my application. Not a lot of use having a cheaper or more efficient system if individuals can be refused cover for whatever reason, which in the US is very common. Bastards.

Yours faithfully,
CHRISTINA THORNHILL,

Bamber Bridge, Lancs.

Making allowances

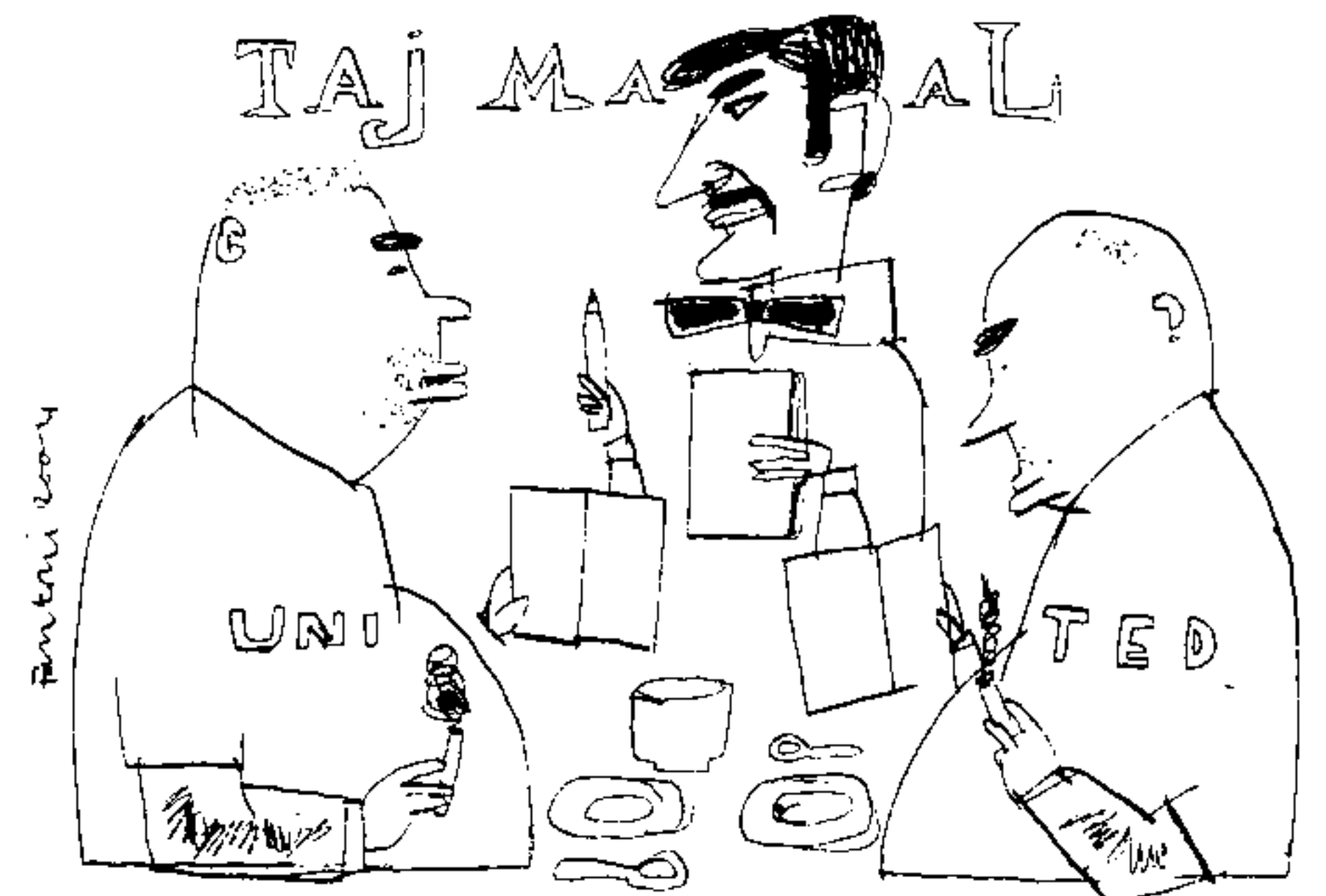
Sir,

You report that the prosecution objected to bail for bent councillor John Astley on the basis that if released he would attend a council meeting and bag himself another six months of allowances. The judge, one hopes, was influenced only by the factors in the Bail Act 1976, largely to do with absconding and further offences. Keeping an unconvicted man in prison to prevent him doing something lawful, even if one doesn't approve of it or him, is a dangerous road to go down, and surely not one *Private Eye* was applauding.

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD COLBEY,

Temple, London EC4.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I've had enough lager already, thank you. And can I have the chicken curry really, really mild?"

Matt finish

Sir,

I note that *Ad Nauseam* shows the Labour Party general-secretary to be one Matt Barker. I could have sworn that the unfortunate soul in charge there was a certain Matt Carter.

Cheers,
PAUL LEAKE,

Durham.

Lookalike



Oscar



Blair

Sir,

I couldn't help but notice the disarming similarity between Oscar, the ambitious fast-talking stickleback of the new movie *Shark Tale*, and another slippery customer floundering in the Commons last week.

Could they perchance be related?

Yours faithfully,
O.J. HINGSTON,

Via email.

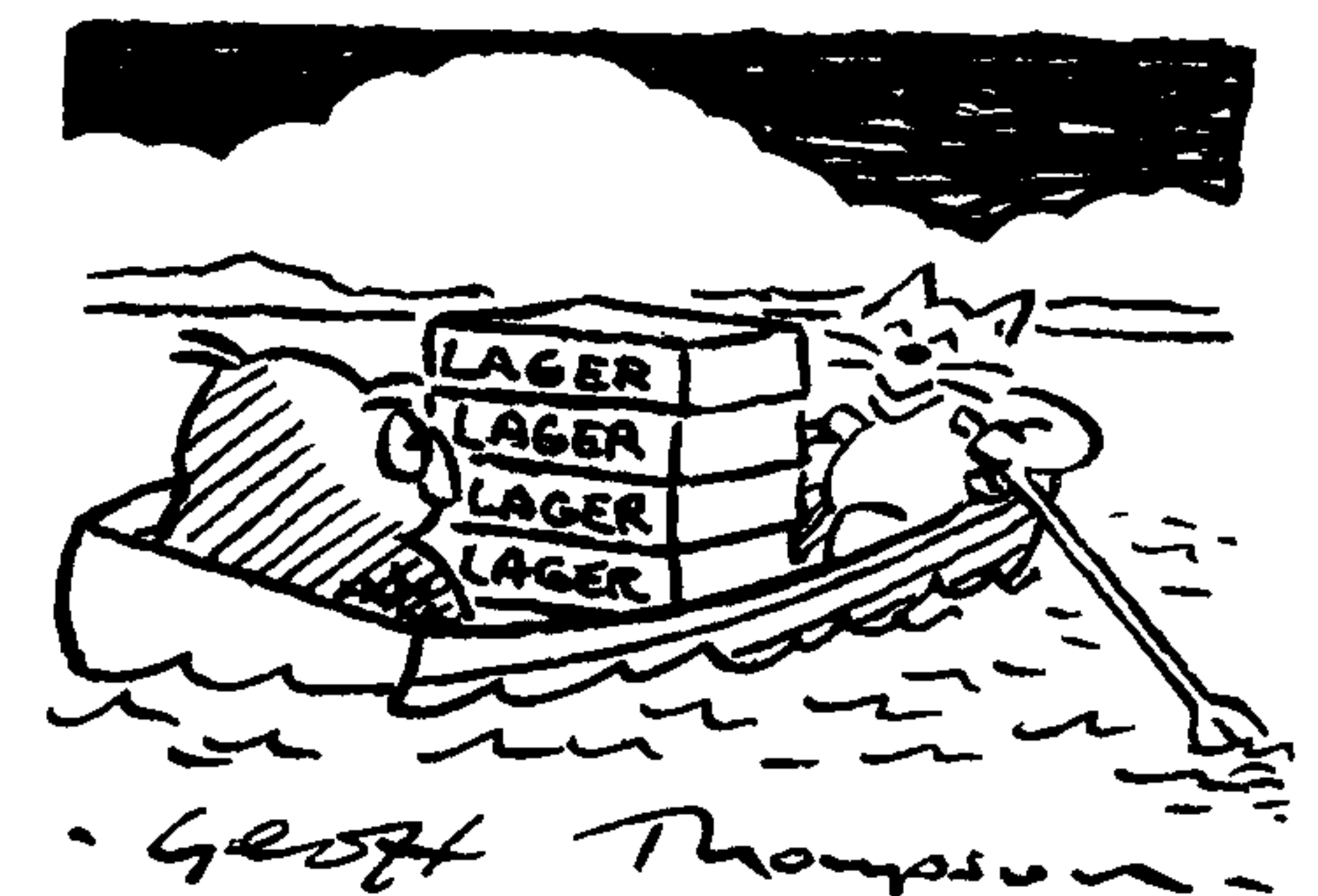
Prisoner of conscience

Sir,

David Aaronovitch has already comprehensively reneged on his pledge to disbelieve the government following the confirmation that there were no WMD in Iraq.

He has maintained his support for Blair and his government, and, in a series of pieces headed "Was I Right About Iraq?" has ruthlessly interrogated his conscience. You will be relieved to know he was.

GEOFF BOOTH,
Knebworth, Herts.



Bath chair

Sir,

Oops! HP Sauce is a little wide of the mark. I've never suggested Don Foster is finished as MP for Bath (Eye 1117). He's a brilliant MP, and I – along with many others – will be campaigning to get him re-elected for as many times as he chooses to re-stand. It's true, I do chat to fellow hacks about forthcoming vacancies in constituencies where a Lib Dem MP is standing down.

But I guess Cheltenham does sound a little like Bath!

All the best,
TIM BULLAMORE,

Chair, Bath Liberal Democrats.

Lookalike



Queen



Queen

Sir,

Seeing a photograph and report in the Daily Telegraph recently, I was struck by the resemblance of Cambodia's Queen Monineath to our present queen. Are they, by any chance, related or, indeed, as an example of job share, the same person?

Yours sincerely,
TERENCE RICHARDS,

Coventry, Warwicks.

Every little yelps

Sir,

Ruth Holt's avowed belief in the wonders of Tesco (Letters, Eye 1117) was suitably depressing, yet sadly seems to mirror the attitude of most British consumers. It may well be the case that shopping with little Jimmy is more convenient there and that the total bill "still compares well with Sainsbury's". However, she should ask herself whether a few pounds off the weekly shopping bill is really worth the disheartening town centres, with their lines of discount shops and fast food outlets; the villages devoid of local services; a weakened farming industry; and the massive environmental cost as everyone piles into their cars and drives to the supermarket.

Ms Holt suggests that the Eye "is in danger of knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing". Her self-centred musings suggest that it is she who is most open to this charge.

Yours,
J.W. BYROM (DR),

Kettleshulme, Cheshire.

LUVVIES

I began the day in the gym. Acting is easier after exercise: it warms up your heart, prepares you to absorb your character's DNA.

TARA FITZGERALD,
Daily Telegraph

Submitted by Andrew Blackman

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Column Solutions

Sir,

I wondered if you might start a new "spotter" column – along the lines of Neophiliacs, Luvvies, etc – for the increasingly prevalent, already clichéd and somehow pretentious use of "Solutions" in company titles and subtitles, and in advertising in general.

For example (all real examples I've seen recently):

Not storage, but Storage Solutions

Not furniture, but Furniture Solutions

Not cardboard boxes, but Packaging Solutions

Not signage, but Sign Solutions

Not a payroll bureau, but Business Solutions

Not a diet, but Slimming Solutions

Not a plumber, but Plumbing Solutions!

This letter has been prompted by my favourite to date: I just had a Sandwich Solution for lunch!

Kind regards,
ANNA C,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"And, in case you're wondering, Jagielka is related to his younger brother at Sheffield United, Phil."

KEVIN KEATINGS, Sky Sports 1
(Maurice Barnes)

"David Beckham is the victim of his own downfall."

Radio 5 Live
(Martin Naughton)

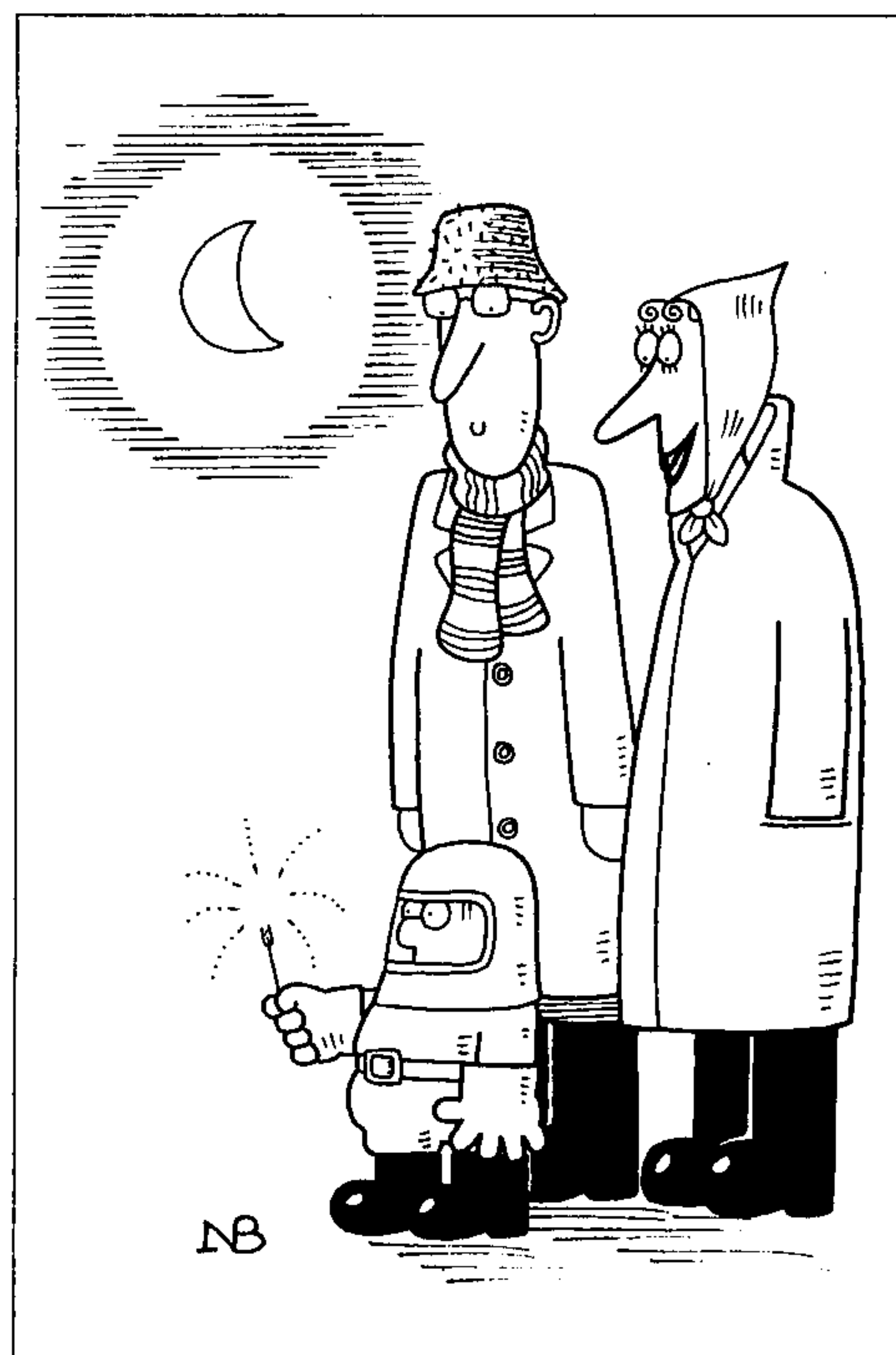
"There are a lot of tired legs wearing Tottenham shirts."

ANDY GRAY, Sky Sports
(F. Purvis)

"Wales clinging on to a foothold..."

JOHN MOTSON, BBC1
(Mike O'Connor)

"So there you are thinking you've died of something and you've died of something else."
SUSAN McREYNOLDS, BBC Radio Foyle
(Christine Casey)



Give him a medal

Sir,

May I suggest an addition to your Iraq Honours List? How about The Distinguished Lying Cross?

DAVID FRITH,

London N10.

Gender studies

Sir,

Continual letters on one subject are trite, but this is too good to miss.

Re: Mr James Hobro's neutered German lass (issue 1117). The French are more explicit. Quoting the great humorist and plaudits to him [A.P. Herbert], "That portion of a woman that appeals to man's depravity", the French call it "le vagin", bless 'em! Eye eye love it.

Yours (non-pedantesque),
MAX,

Via email.

Sir,

In defending Nicky Campbell's objecting to the misuse of the word "gender", James Hobro quotes the neuter girl in German. These examples are rather more startling:

German, Latin and French have words for "watchman" which are feminine; in Latin the word for "hired thug" is also feminine; the ordinary Latin words for the male and female organs are feminine and masculine respectively. (If you want the details: die Wache, la sentinelle, custodia; opera; mentula, cunnus.)

BARRY THORPE,

Heald Green.

HOM SAP



AUSTIN



Schoolboy humour

Sir,

It's so wearisomely depressing to see a magazine as witty, intelligent and evolved as your own tittering and guffawing like some innuendo-crazed first-year public schoolboy at Peter Mandelson's choice of address (p3, 1117). What on earth is so funny about him being gay? Would you print a similar story if Trevor Phillips, say, moved to Blackboys Lane? Frankly, it does one's head in.

JEREMY LAZELL,

Stirling.

Letter from Caracas

from Our Own Correspondent

WE WERE delighted to read recently in expensive, full-page ads in the international press that our lives are improving "in ways that were never before thought possible". Apparently poverty and social exclusion will soon be a thing of the past because oil wealth is to be distributed among all of us.



"Venezuela is for all!" is the new slogan. This is especially good news for the 20,000 or so who have been sacked from the state oil company because they disagreed with government policy or because they refused to sign statements denouncing their colleagues as saboteurs for having gone on strike. We're convinced that, any day now, proving you didn't sign the petition against President Hugo Chavez will no longer be a pre-requisite for a job in the public sector. Or a loan to start up a small business. Or to win a government contract.

To be honest we had been a little concerned. And we thought the world didn't understand us. There was that open letter from those distinguished citizens of your country – Tariq Ali, Ken Livingstone, George Galloway and the nice Mr Pinter – entitled "If I were Venezuelan, I'd vote for Hugo Chavez". The one in which they said Mr Chavez was "determined to apply the 1999 constitution". And that the opposition consisted of "political and economic minorities".

Didn't they understand that by placing the armed forces at the service of the revolution, the president was violating article 328, which specifically says their loyalty is to "the nation"? Or that by tapping phones without a court order, and broadcasting selected highlights of private conversations, he was in breach of article 48, which guarantees the right to privacy? Or that... but why go on? Now we see how wrong we ordinary people were.

We should never have doubted Jimmy Carter when he immediately endorsed the results of the August referendum that kept Chavez in power before actually auditing the electronic voting process. We mistakenly thought the fact that the electoral authority had a built-in 3:2 government majority and had spent nearly a year inventing new rules and procedures to invalidate the three million signatures on the referendum petition was grounds for suspicion that they might have committed fraud. But that can't be right because Mr Carter says it's the electoral authorities in Florida who are not sufficiently impartial to produce an internationally certifiable result. So ours must be ok. What a relief! Because now we have regional elections coming up too.

Of course it was worrying when Mr Chavez hosted Robert Mugabe and praised him as a "warrior for freedom". We took a look around – at spiralling crime, increased unemployment and poverty, conflicts over land tenure, a dysfunctional justice system – and thought maybe our joke about Venezuela turning into "Zimbabwe with oil" wasn't so funny after all. So that advertisement has certainly set our minds to rest.

We realise now that Mr Ali and Mr Livingstone and Mr Carter (not forgetting Mr Pinter) must have had a quiet word with Mr Chavez before the referendum. We're guessing that he reassured them that he wouldn't use the new supreme court law to appoint 12 sympathisers that now guarantees him control of the judiciary. And that the new media law, the new police law, the public order law, the reform of the penal code and so on wouldn't be used to crack down on opposition. (Especially those 20 to 30-year sentences for "destabilising the social order"! He almost certainly committed himself to instructing the national guard not to shoot or torture opposition demonstrators, and to insisting on a thorough investigation of hundreds of human rights violations over the past five years.

So, all in all, really good news. We just can't wait for this new policy of tolerance and social justice to be implemented. Because, frankly, things are pretty unbearable right now.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

● "Normally, I wouldn't dream of murdering anyone," twenty-seven-year-old nanny Sara Svensson told the District Court in Uppsala, "but I thought I was obeying direct orders from God. For months I'd been receiving text messages from Jesus on my cellphone, offering me spiritual guidance, and telling me over and over again that I must shoot Alexandra Fossmo right through the head. I know now that those text messages were actually sent by her husband, Pastor Helge Fossmo, but at the time I thought they were sent by the Almighty, and I became a robot, programmed to kill."

Earlier, the prosecution had explained how Helge Fossmo, a Norwegian-born Pentecostal preacher, had planned the murder of his own wife. "Pastor Fossmo had been having an affair with his children's nanny, and his wife had begun to suspect. Miss Svensson is a rather naive young woman, and Pastor Fossmo took advantage of her gullibility by sending her text messages, purporting to be from God. At first the messages just encouraged her in her religion, but then they started ordering her to shoot Mrs Fossmo, to prove her faith, and telling her where she could find a gun. After she'd killed Mrs Fossmo, she received another message telling her to kill a neighbour, Daniel Linde, and she shot him too, though he survived. At that point we arrested her, checked her cellphone, and discovered that the text messages had not been sent by God as she claimed, but from Pastor Fossmo's handset. We also discovered that the Pastor had been having an affair with Mrs Linde too, and that's why he wanted her husband killed."

Pastor Fossmo was found guilty of murder, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Svensson was also found guilty of murder, and sentenced to psychiatric care. (*Aftonbladet [Sweden]*, 3/8/04. Spotter: David Clifford)

— ● —

● "When hair first began growing all over my body, people called me a freak," rock singer Yu Zhenhuan told reporters at the Number 9 People's Hospital in Shanghai, "and I felt deeply humiliated during my childhood. But later, I grew to love my hair, because it makes me different, and I realise that being officially recognised as 'The World's Hairiest Man' makes

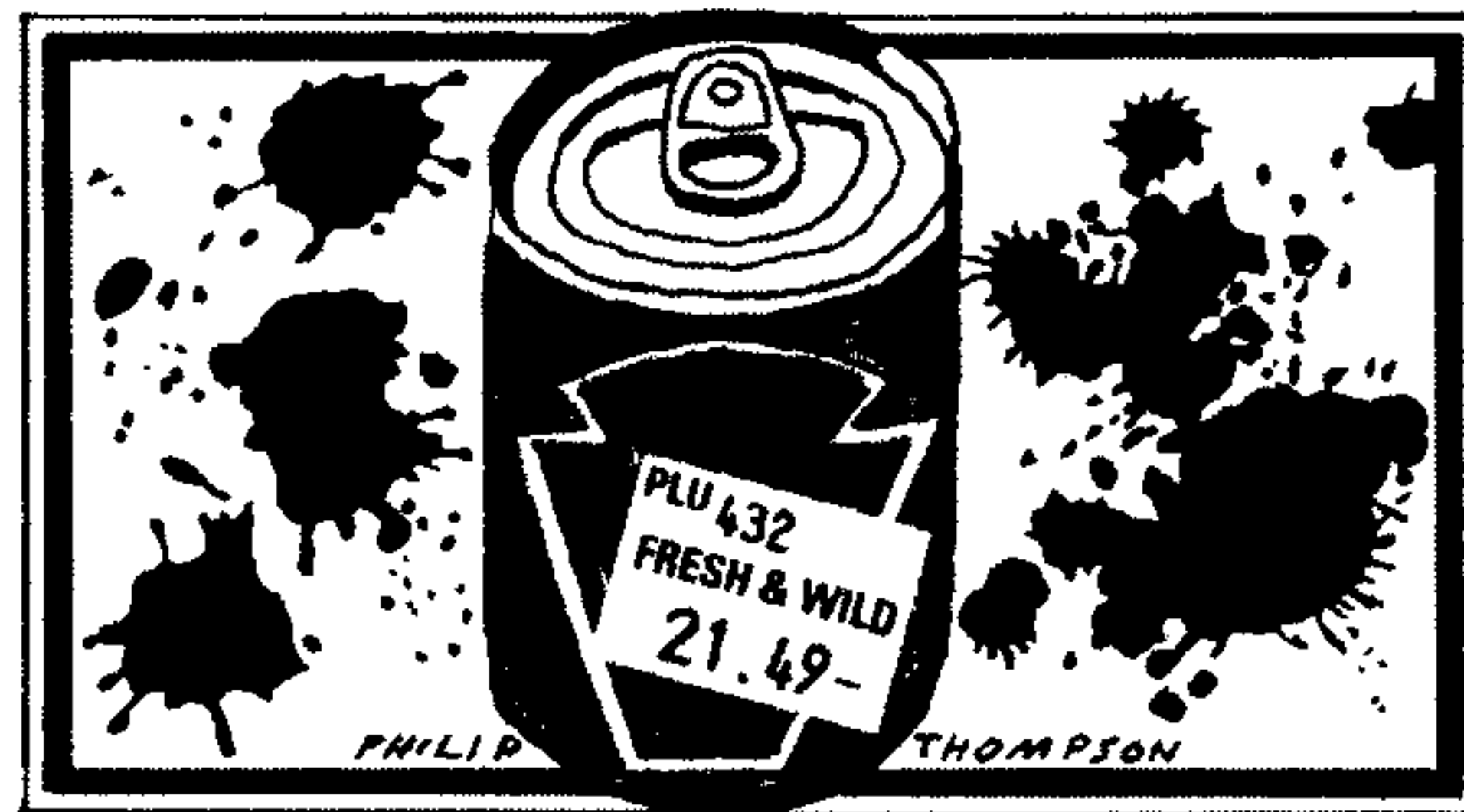
me popular on stage. I had to have this operation to remove it from my ears, because they were so full of hair that I could no longer hear anything, and I was suffering from headaches. But I won't be shaving any other parts of my body, because removing my hair would mean taking away a part of my personality."

Dr Chen Jin'an then revealed what the operation on Yu (who has dense hair on 96% of his body, and has been dubbed 'the world's hairiest man' by The Guinness Book of Records) had involved. "The hair inside Yu's ears was several inches long, and had become matted and compacted. Not only was it blocking his hearing, it was also putting a dangerous amount of pressure on his brain. So we detached the skin from his ears, removed the hair and the follicles so it couldn't grow back, broadened the auditory meatus, then reattached the skin to his ears. We offered to remove hair from other parts of his body as well, but he declined, saying that it would mean he was losing confidence in being who he is." (*China Daily*, 7/8/04. Spotter: Jane McLellis)

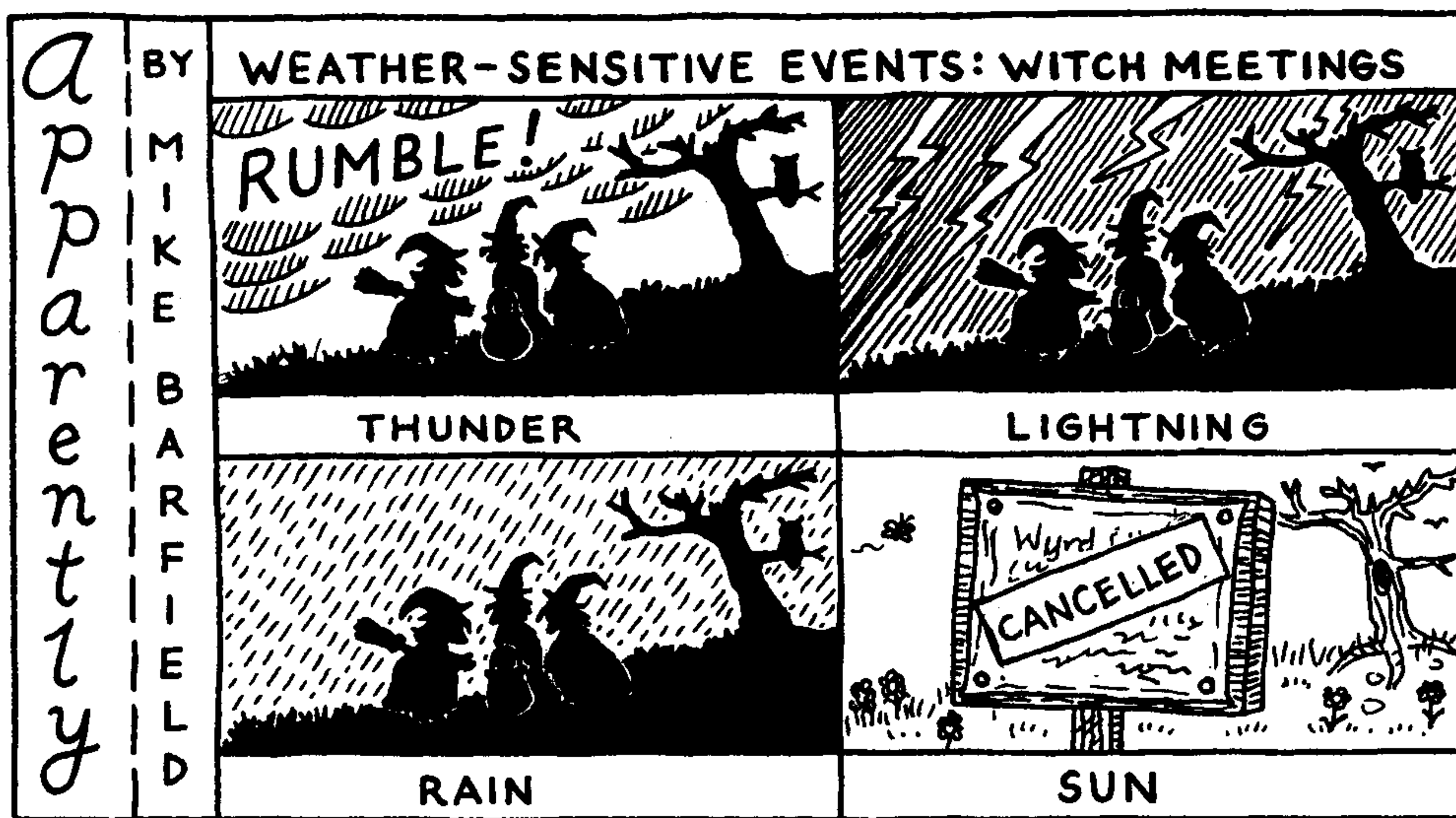
— ● —

● "In African culture, there is no death," Mathole Motshekga told reporters in the rural village of Ceres in Limpopo, "there is merely the separation of body and soul. So the fact that the bride and groom are both dead does not mean that the relationship has irretrievably broken down. And it is vitally important that the wedding goes ahead, because it is not just the individuals who are married together, it's the families too."

"According to police, it seems that David Masenta and his pregnant fiancée Mgwani



Molomo were quarrelling, when he took a gun and shot her over an argument about the price of beans. Then, full of remorse, he turned the gun on himself. However, family and friends wanted to remember them as a happy couple who were destined to have a happy life together, so the ceremony will go ahead today as planned. The groom's corpse will be dressed in a cream suit, while the bride's corpse will wear a white gown. A priest will bless the union, after which they will be buried side by side." (*The Sowetan*, 26/8/04. Spotter: Patricia Merino)



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And I'll bet you don't know what I'll be talking about this week! God's gift of Gambling! Feeling lucky? Of course you are, because you've heard the best news to hit the parish for a long time!

Yes, St Albion's is shortly to become the gambling capital of the world – but only, of course, in a responsible way!

There have been a lot of scare stories about how we are going to turn the church into Las Vegas, with rows of slot machines down the nave, and blackjack being played on our communion table!

Honestly! What sort of vicar do you think I am?

Of course there will be slot machines. But only in the vestry, where they can be accessed by responsible parishioners between the hours of nine in the morning and nine the next morning.

As for the blackjack and 'craps' table, this will be out of the way in the crypt, so no worries there!

And, furthermore, Mrs Jowell has personally vetted the highly respectable and long-established firm from Nevada, Corleone and Capone, which will be installing and running the very limited gaming facilities which will be available on the church premises.

But I know that, despite all our wise and careful precautions, there will still be a small minority of parishioners who will insist that gambling is "sinful"!

What an old-fashioned word and what an old-fashioned attitude!

Nowadays, we read the Bible very differently! And when it says "Thou shalt not encourage thy neighbour to lose everything that he hath, in the vain hope of securing the pot that is jack", we don't now think for a minute that this is suggesting that gambling in itself is in any way a bad thing!

No, what it's saying is that 'responsible' gambling is great! It is as much part of our cultural fabric as the bowling green, the church tower or Mr Desmond's Adult Mags And Videos Centre behind the chip shop and opposite the Binge and Vomit (formerly the Queen's Arms).

And gaming, let's face it, performs a very valuable social function, by bringing people together in a darkened room, to enjoy themselves in silence, gazing at a spinning wheel!

And aren't we all, in a very real sense, just players on the Great Wheel of Fortune, wondering whether we will land on the black or the red, the odd or the even, the gay or the straight?

And when we have all had our 'harmless night of fun', will we go home having 'filled our boots'?

Or will we perhaps return home



How the church will look by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

penniless, to watch our wives and children starve to death and then take the only honourable way out by jumping in the path of an Intercity train (if there are any!)?

I'm only joking, of course, because I know that here in St Albion's we are sufficiently adult to ensure that any gambling is conducted only in a responsible manner, so that no one will lose any money.

Furthermore, Mrs Jowell has arranged with Messrs Corleone and Capone that a very large percentage of any profits they may make (possibly as much as 2 percent) will be handed back to the parish to supplement church funds and to provide pensions for the less needy members of the community, following Mr Brown's frankly somewhat incompetent handling of our finances, due to his recurring mental disability (no offence, Gordon!).

Tony

✝ To Remember In Your Prayers

● May we all particularly remember at this time our good friend Geoff Hoon, who has served so loyally and so long on the PCC. In recent days, Geoff has not been very well, and has been saying things that he would have done better to keep quiet about. Give him strength to be more discreet about important decisions that the vicar has already made but is wisely keeping to himself. May he remember that there are other members of our congregation who could perform his parish duties just as well, if not better than himself. T.B.

Text For The Week

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lays down his life for his friends."

Epistle of Tony to the West community

A Message Of Thanks From The Rev. Dubya Bush Of The Church Of The Latter-Day Moremen



Brothers and Sisters in St Albion's, praise be to your good pastor, the Rev. Terry Bloom, who is once again courageously alone in choosing to give me his unflagging support in my ongoing crusade against the forces of the Evil One, eg that lily-livered, flip-flopping, liberal-loving, atheistical abortionist and homosexual John Kerry. Only your man Timmy has taken to his heart the concept of loyalty. He has come to see that there could be no greater disloyalty than not doing what I say. Hallelujah! Bring em 'on!

X Rev. Dubya, his mark

Women's Groups



Mrs Blears gave a very interesting talk, proving that 90 percent of mothers had been beaten up by their partners during pregnancy.

She argued that it was time for all prospective fathers to be forced by law to register themselves as abusers before attempting to make a woman pregnant.

This would make it easier to arrest them during ante-natal classes. There was a vote of thanks from the ladies and Mrs Jowell then organised a 'responsible' tombola, in which everyone lost their money, but not very much.



Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

It is surely no concern of anyone in the parish where I choose to live or who pays for my flat in Asquith Grove. I have very important duties in the parish, which mean that I must have a pied-à-terre near the church (which obviously must be paid for out of parish funds, as is only right and proper), and the fact that I have a modest 19-bedroom mansion up the road is quite irrelevant.

Yours,

Mrs Barbara Follett,

(Whichever of my various homes

I happen to be in at the time)

The Editor has received similar letters from Mrs Beckett, Mr Prescott, Mr Hain, Mr Hoon, Mr Dismore and many others too numerous and too embarrassing to print. D.H

U.S. ELECTIONS

LATE SWING TO BUSH

Lady Magnesia To Blame

by Our Man In Clark County, Lunchtime O'Hio

TOP BRITISH historian Lady Magnesia Freelove was hailed by republicans last night as the saviour of President Bush's faltering attempt to win a second term in the White House.

A personal letter from Lady Magnesia to the voters of key

swing state Clark County urged them to vote for Senator Kerry. The letter, first printed in the Guardian newspaper, is now credited with provoking a huge nationwide backlash in favour of the incumbent president, giving Bush a staggering 60 point landslide lead in the final days of campaigning.

That Letter In Full

Dear Little American Person,

I am sure you have heard of me and may even have read my many books - 'The Life of King Henry the Ninth', 'Mary Queen of Wales' and 'Elizabeth III', to name only four.

Anyway, what you mustn't do in your election is vote for that frightful, vulgar, Bush fellow. Instead, you must put your cross next to the nice Mr

Kerry, whose wife is very charming and very rich - just like myself.

And now my husband Harold who, as you no doubt know, is the world's greatest writer, would like to add a little thought of his own:

"Tell fucking Bush to fuck off and disappear up his own fucking arse."

I think that is rather beautifully put, don't you?

Lady Magnesia Freelove, Historian and Mother of Six, Islington.

Match of the Century



NEASDEN END RECORD RUN

by E.I. Erewego Our Man With The Sainsbury's Tuna and Sweetcorn Sandwich (Taste the Difference!)

THE WORLD of soccer was rocked to its foundations yesterday when Neasden F.C. ended a 50 year losing streak by winning the match against their local rivals Dollis Hill.

There was however a controversial goal in the 26th minute when the referee Sid Himmler deliberately kicked the ball into the Dollis Hill net.

As the scoreboard flashed one-nil the fans (Sid and Doris Bonker) swarmed onto the pitch to embrace their hero. The German born referee immediately awarded another goal to

Neasden making a final result of Neasden 2 Dollis Hill 0. Said a spokesman for the club:

"It is a historic day for the club and for our new chairman Sid Himmler."

LATE SCORE

Neasden 2
(S. Himmler 2)
Dollis Hill..... 0

Man of the match: Neasden's exciting man in black S.Himmler.



"Lulus, Sir. Thousands of them."

Daily Express



My Boss Is Wonderful

by Our Showbiz staff
John Craven-Hack

ONE of the greatest rock drummers of all time showed his paces yesterday in the top London venue of the Blackfriars offices of the Daily Express (see above).

OBN

Richard 'Ringo' Desmond gave an impromptu display of drum wizardry which established him as easily the equivalent of Charlie Watts,

Ginger Baker and the legendary Peregrine Worsthorne (*Is this right? Ed.*).

More OBN

Said 'Ringo' Desmond, "I am really good on the skins and to prove it just look at this brilliant new magazine I've produced called *Readers' Drums*."

Richard Desmond is worth £46 million p.a.



POLLY FILLER



IT'S the biggest challenge of modern motherhood – juggling modern motherhood with promoting your book about the challenge of modern motherhood!

Yes, *More Mummy For Old Rope* (Tyrell and Johnson £8.99) is in the shops now – a hilarious sideways look at negotiating the daily tightrope of school runs, children's parties, dead hamsters, useless partners and linguistically challenged au-pairs!!

And now it's hot off the presses, how on earth am I meant to combine doing an interview on Radio Shropshire's 'Night Cap' (the late-night phone-in for night owls in the Shropshire area) with dealing with toddler Charlie's homework, writing a poem about slugs! Talking of which, the useless Simon has been no use at all on the domestic front whilst yours truly is on the road, trying to bring a smile to the hard-pressed mums of Britain and the world, according to my publishers!

Because, instead of writing a few simple lines about our slimy friends, Simon thinks it's more helpful to watch '100 Greatest Lift Music Classics'

on the UK NBG Channel, presented by Paul Ross and A.A. Gill. So, guess who ended up having to write 'Ode To A Slug'? That's right, the private tutor we hired to help get Charlie into High Fees Pre-Preparatory School For Boys (the feeder for all the top prep schools which feed the top London day schools which feed all the top universities or, rather, they don't any more, which is a bloody disgrace when you've spent all that money, but that's another column !!).

SO, I hear you ask, what's the answer, Polly? How are you managing to launch an international best-seller (*More Mummy For Old Rope*) – don't miss the author reading extracts at the Ashford Literary Festival, November 12th) with filling in the nightmare two weeks of Charlie's half-term?

Simple. Dump your offspring on your sister for the duration! She's got four kids (Rollo, Milo, Tizzy and Sprog), so she's hardly going to notice one more, not in a house that big! Meanwhile, the new Russian au-pair (Charlie calls her "Uzbecky" as a joke, since none of us can pronounce her real name) looks after Simon, allowing yours truly to further the cause of the Working Mum and rearrange the books in Waterstone's to make sure *'More Mummy For Old Rope'* is prominently displayed in front of some of the other, frankly, inferior "humorous" sideways looks at the perils of modern motherhood! (No offence to my rivals, ie *'Take The Mummy And Run'*, *'Funny Mummy'* and *'Mummy Makes The World Go Round'*, to name but three!?)

© P. Filler 2004.



A Century Of New Words

A sensational new book **Howlers And Bummers** – the 'language report' – has provided Britain's editors with a wonderful excuse for filling up whole pages with lists of words, instead of having to think up any ideas.

The book, by top TV language expert, **Suzi Dunce**, of the *Countupyourmoney* programme, shows how many familiar buzz words in fact came into fashion long before you would imagine.

Here is Suzi's eye-opening list, which tells us how we lived and what we said in the hundred years of the 20th Century:

- 1904** Jet Lag
- 1905** Sellotape
- 1906** Kentucky Fried Chicken
- 1907** Weapons of Mass Destruction
- 1908** Hip Hop
- 1909** Google

And that's just the first decade. Some periods were particularly fertile for these new words which were soon on everybody's lips. Such a time was the Second World War:

- 1939** Walking Stick

- 1940** Mange-Tout
- 1941** Art Deco
- 1942** Hitler
- 1943** Fish Fingers
- 1944** Bling-Bling
- 1945** Good Evening

But even this period was nothing compared to the Sixties, perhaps the most prolific decade for buzz words of all time. Ms Dunce singles out, for instance:

- 1960** Flappers
- 1961** Maltesers
- 1962** iPod
- 1963** Spud-U-Like
- 1964** New Labour

The list carries on right up to the present day. The big vogue word this year, according to Ms Dunce, has been:

- 2004** Old Rope (what apparently a great many editors are prepared to give money for)

the PREMIERSH*TS

Paul Wouy



THE average age worldwide for a first bonk is 17.7 years.

The Sun

Articles For Sale

6 DINING room chairs, repro chip and date. 1 year old. cost £650 will except £250

Cranleigh Times

- **Absolute peace of mind**
Due to End 28/10/2004.
- **More Details**

Dell's internet site

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES NEW EDUCATION FUCK-UP

by Our Education Staff

THE GOVERNMENT today announced a radical fuck-up of the entire secondary education system aimed at reversing the decline in standards and the failure to produce employable school-leavers.

"It is high time for another fuck-up," said the author of the government's new report,

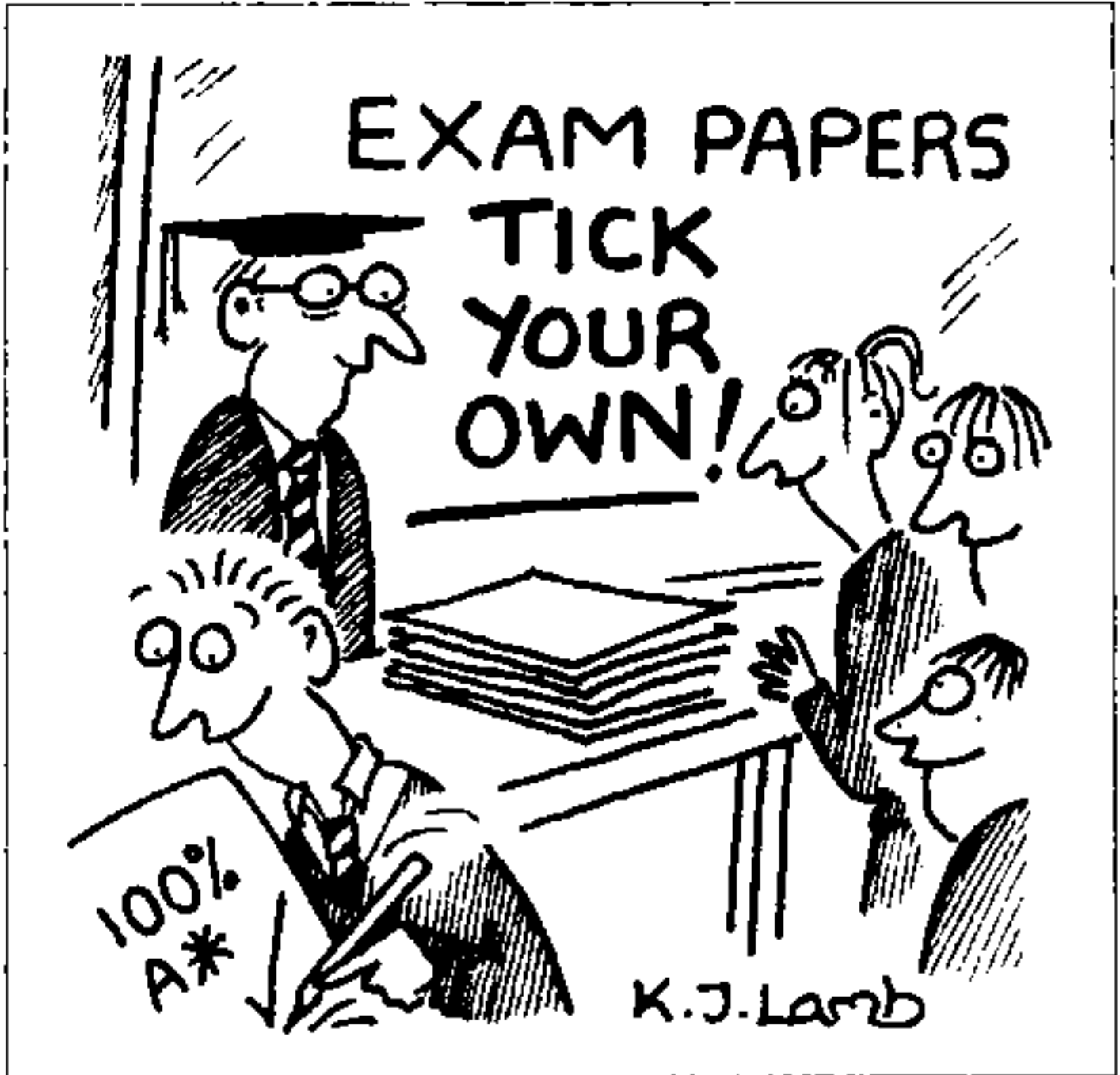
Michael Tomlinson.

"We haven't fucked up schools since the big fuck-up when we introduced AS Levels and the fuck-ups before that when we introduced GCSEs, coursework, continuous assessment and all the other bright ideas that have made the education system what it is today."

Mr Tomlinson said: "This is the fuck-up to end all fuck-ups."

APOLOGY

We apologise to readers for the typographical errors in the above piece, where the word "shake" has been inadvertently replaced each time by the word "fuck". This may have led to a regrettable change in the overall interpretation by readers of the likely success of the radical reforms instituted by Mr Tomlinson and we regret any confusion caused.



Exclusive To All Newspapers

20-YEAR- OLD IN NIGHTCLUB SCUFFLE

SHOCKING news emerged last night, when it became clear that a 20-year-old male had been involved in a scuffle outside a nightclub.

The nightclub owner said, "I'm pushed to think of another time when this kind of thing has happened – apart from those occasions when a day ends in a 'y'."

My eBay

smoothas (1,945)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-4 of 4 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ 'Coins of the Realm' set of pre-decimal British currency – holder cracked	£9.99	£1.50	1
☐ 'Illustrated History of the Crusades', leather-bound, some views faded	£10.99	£4.50	1
☐ 'Little Britain' DVD	£12.99	£1.50	1

Items I'm Selling (1-3 of 3 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ 'ManTanFastic' sun-lamp (bulbs need replacing)	£14.99	£3.50	0
☐ '1,001 Arabian Nights' storybook, unwanted gift	£9.99	£5.00	0
☐ 8x10 photo Joan Collins, signed, dedicated 'With love and all best wishes to my dear friend Robin'	£1.99	£1.50	0

Dyke Pens Apology For Blair

THE ex-Director General of the BBC, Greg Dyke, has penned what he believes would be an acceptable apology for Tony Blair to make to the nation in respect of the Prime Minister's actions leading up to, and during, the war in Iraq. Below are the main points of the suggested apology:

- 1. I'm sorry, it was my fault Greg Dyke lost his job, and he did nothing wrong at any point because he was so marvellous.
- 2. Er...
- 3. That's it.





Glenda Slagg Pays Tribute To The Living Legend Who Died Yesterday – Lynda Lee-Potter, the First Lady of Fleet Street

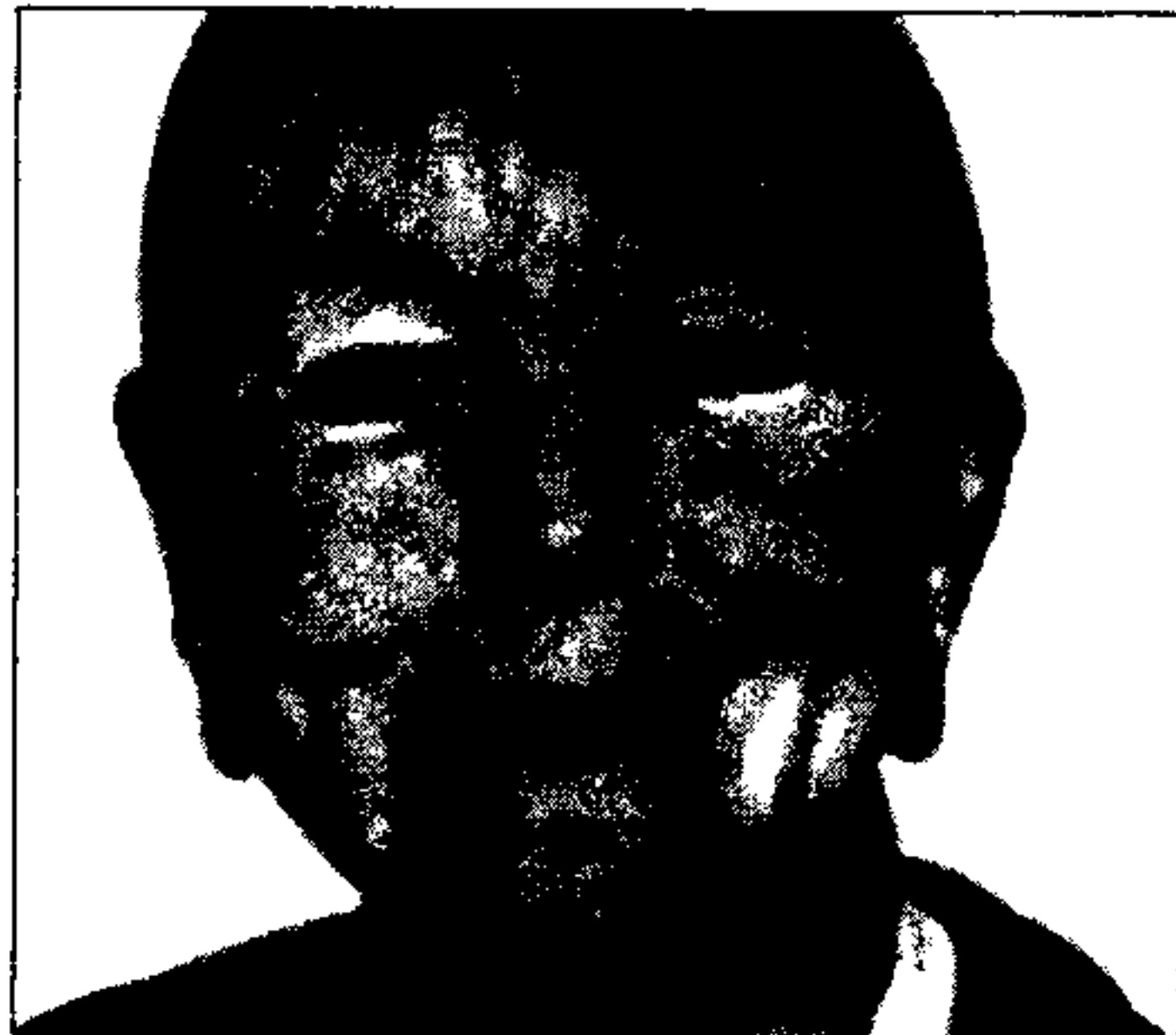
A whole nation is united in grief, as every man, woman and child in Britain mourns the death of the woman who spoke for Middle England.

And not just Middle – but the entire country, rich and poor, young and old, male and female.

She was fearless, bold and without fear.

She voiced what every single person was thinking, but did not have the courage, the ability or the talent to put into words.

And what words they were! By turns waspish, outspoken, witty, poignant, heart-rending, wry, spry, dry, gritty, grotty,



waspy, wispy... there are simply not enough words in the dictionary to begin to describe the towering yet petite figure who for 30 years has dominated British journalism like no one else.

Words That Will Live Forever

Here are just some of the immortal jewels which tripped so effortlessly from Lynda's tireless word processor:

On Princess Di

"Aren't chasickofher? Spoiled, pampered, publicity-crazed, mad, a life-size barbie doll, with anorexia thrown in." 29 Sept 1997

"Beautiful, brave, compassionate and caring – I don't mind admitting that I wept buckets when I heard that Diana was cruelly taken from us. And anyone who remained dry-eyed should be strung up." 30 Sept 1997

On Food, Drink And Everything Else

"...bottled water – what a waste of money! And it tastes disgusting. When we were kids we just had water out of the tap – and it tasted delicious. I wouldn't

give that bottled rubbish to my cat." 12 July 1985

"Kids today – they don't know how lucky they are! In the old days we were all dying of typhoid because of that evil-smelling tap water that our grandmothers made us drink. Now they can go to the local shop and buy a 2-litre bottle of that sparkling, pure, clear-as-a-mountain spring water for as little as £10." 13 July 1985

On Elaine Paige

"What a talentless, useless cow – and rude too!" 7 March 1992

"What a talentless, useless cow that Elaine Paige is – and rude with it!" 8 March 1992

"Who gets my vote as the rudest, most useless, least talented cow in show business? You guessed it, mister – Elaine Paige." 9 March 1992

LYNDA – THE TRIBUTES FLOW IN

Kofi Annan: I shall miss her pungent comments on world affairs more than I can say.

Saddam Hussein: She was firm but fair. I valued her opinions.

President George W. Bush: A very great writer who spoke

for Middle Earth.

Tony Blair: I agree with whatever the President says.

Big Brother's Nadia: She was warm, she was witty, she was wise. She was the Jane Austen of our time. Is that what you'd like me to say?

Who Would You Want To See Succeeding Lynda Lee-Potter As The First Lady Of Fleet Street?

1 Amanda Platell

2 Barbara Amiel

3 Julie Burchill

4 Christina Odone

5 The late Jean Rook

6 Lady Antonia Fraser

7 Dame Rowan Pelling

8 Boris Johnson

Just contact our website at www.firstladychoose.com and register your vote for the most important media appointment of the decade.

BUSINESS NEWS

Troubled Sainsbury's Fights Back

BY OUR SUPERMARKET STAFF TESCO O'BOOZE AND PHIL TROLLEY

SAINSBURY'S shares soared to 5p yesterday, following the announcement of the ailing supermarket giant's new strategy to win back millions of customers.

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Spot The Difference

Great moments in Retail Marketing

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THE SCOUSTATOR

The Victim Culture

Whilst the sad events of recent days may tempt some to feel sympathy for the beleaguered staff of the *Spectator*, it is worth remembering that they have brought this tragedy upon their own heads, by deliberately fostering a culture based on a sense of social and moral superiority to the rest of society.

It is true that in recent years the *Spectator* has produced many celebrities who have been cultural

icons of our time.

One thinks of such names as TV's Charles Moore, the top sexual athlete Rod Liddle, the beautiful Kimberley Fortier and, of course, the legendary Greek playboy Taki Takalotof-cokeupthenos.

But behind this veneer of cultural vitality lies a sorry picture of drunkenness, laziness and an arrogant belief that the world owes them a living.

To be frank, the inhabitants of 56 Doughty Street are a bunch of sad, incompetent tossers who (Cont. p. 94)

'I MUST CHOOSE'

admits TV's Boris

by Our Spectator Staff Christopher Housemaster

BORIS JOHNSON, the MP for Henley and editor of the *Spectator*, has admitted that he faces a difficult choice in his busy career.

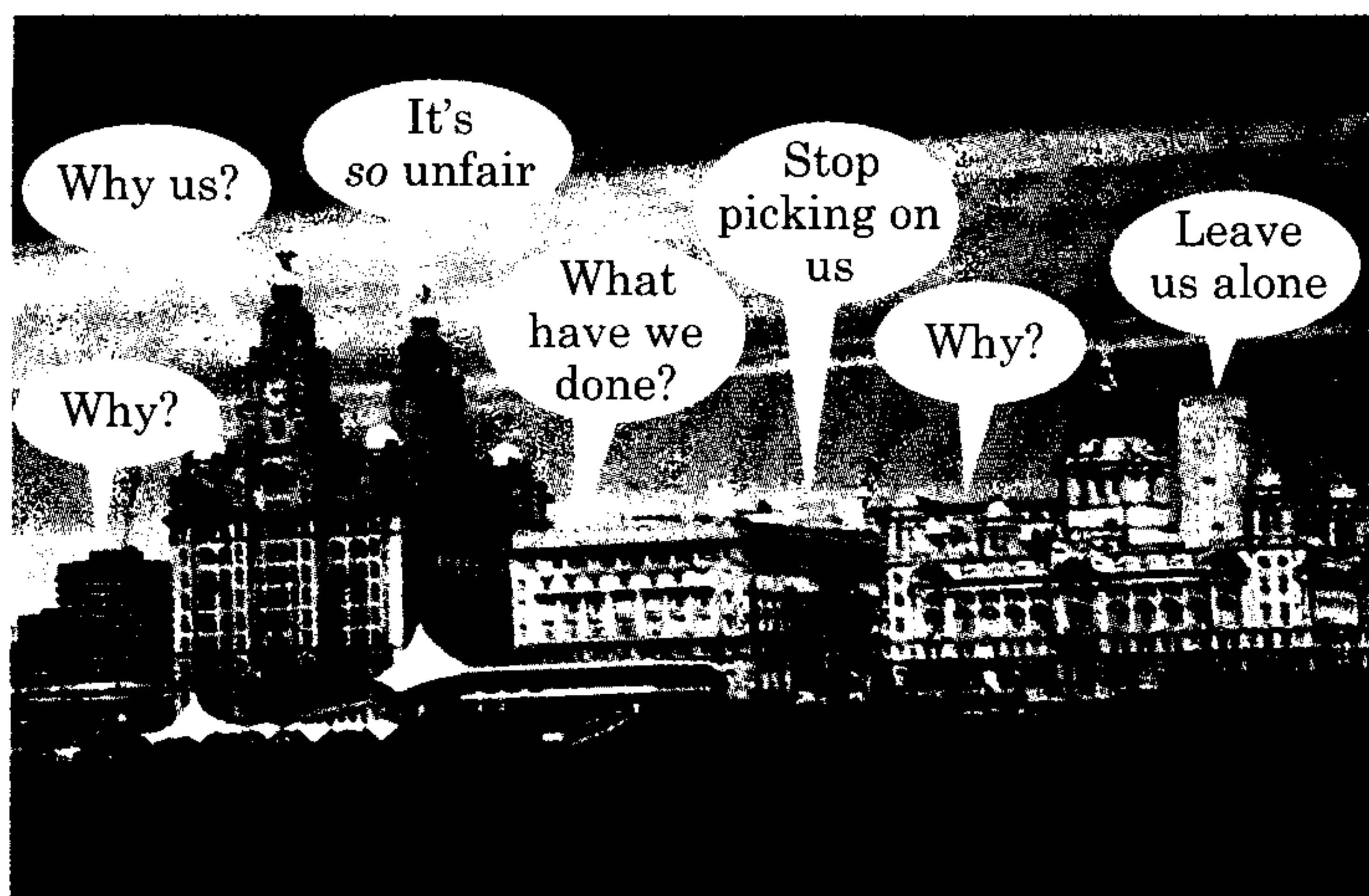
"I have been trying to do two things at once and I now accept that I have to make a choice between being a buffoon or being

a twit. You can't do both."

Said a close friend, "I think Boris will pack in being a twit and concentrate on the buffoonery. Don't forget he's very ambitious and secretly harbours a desire to be leader of the" (Cont. p. 94)



LIVERPOOL FURY OVER VICTIM MENTALITY SLUR



Lives Of The Martyrs

No. 94 BROTHER BORIS



AND there was in those far-off times a holy man, who was known to the multitude only as Boris. His habits were frugal and he travelled everywhere on a humble bicycle, being shouted at by passers-by. Alas, one day, Brother Boris became possessed by a devil, and called down curses on all the good people of the City of Liverpool, who had been many days mourning one of their number who had been cruelly put to death by the Saracens.

Boris went into an high place and cried out, "Woe unto ye, ye people of Mersey. For you are a generation of whingers, filled with mawkish sentimentality and self-pity. Cripeth! Gadzooks! What a dreadful shower you are, by all that is holy!"

No sooner had these intemperate words been uttered by Brother Boris (written out for him as they had been by his fellow-scribe Brother Simon Heffer), than the people of Liverpool waxed wroth.

Which was singular, for it was known that not a single citizen of that fair city ever read the uplifting tracts penned by Brother Boris and his tiny band of co-religionists.

Then in turn did Boris's superior, Father Michael, Abbott of the Transylvanian Brethren, also wax wroth, and commanded his errant novice to do penance for his wicked utterances.

He ordered Brother Boris to don sackcloth and ashes and to make a journey to the distant city of Liverpool, some eighty leagues hence. All along the way, the good friar must flagellate himself with rolled up copies of the *Spectator*, until finally he must go from door to door, pleading for forgiveness from the good folk of Scouseland.

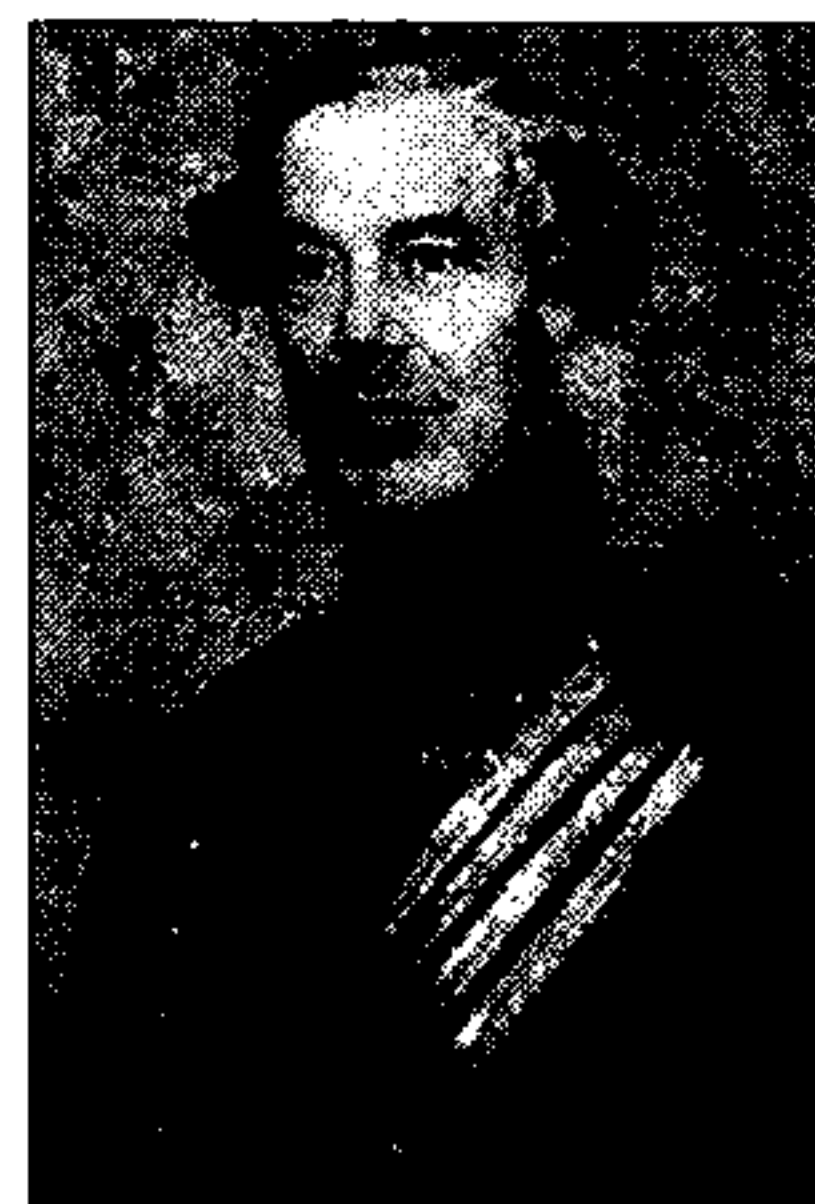
And when Brother Boris carried out the instructions of Father Michael, the good people opened their doors and said "Clear off! We don't know who you are you pasty-faced Southern git!"

And they sent him on his way a sadder and a wiser man (Surely some mistaketh? Ed.).



150TH ANNIVERSARY OF HISTORIC MILITARY BLUNDER

by Our Defence Staff **Phil Graves**



IT IS now 150 hours since the infamous Charge of The Black Watch was ordered by the deranged Commander-in-Chief, Tony Blairigan, with the assistance of his incompetent second-in-command, Geoffrey Hoonan.

Though warned that the mission was almost certain to lead to disaster, the arrogant Blair ordered the

troops to advance.

War Crimean

With pipes skirling and kilts swirling, the gallant men of the now abolished Scottish Regiment obeyed orders and advanced to their destiny.

The poet laureate, Andrew, Lord Motion, commemorated the event in the now completely forgotten poem, 'The Charge of The Black Watch'.

That Poem In Full

*Into the Triangle of Death
Rode the 850,
Sunni to the right of them,
Shia to the left of them.
Frankly, it was hopeless,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to get Bush
And Blair re-elected.*

(Will this do? A.L.M.)

LEADING MAN ADMITS 'I'M USELESS'

by Our Showbiz Staff
Ned Twinky and Phil Bum

THE NEW West End farce *The Conservatives* last night faced disaster when its star performer, Michael Howard, frankly admitted that he was "no good".

Springtime For Thatcher

"I've no idea why they picked me," he said. "I can't do jokes, or even the serious bits in-between."

Mr Howard, who previously starred in such shows as *Phantom of the Opera* and *The Return of Dracula*, has nevertheless made it clear that he will not leave the show.

Richard Dreyfuss is 78.

GLENDA SLAGG

BRITAIN'S NEW FIRST LADY
OF FLEET STREET



■ **THREE CHEERS** for young Harry – the plucky prince who punched the pushy paparazzi!! OK, so he'd had a few in the nightclub!! Tell me of one hot-blooded young man who hasn't done the same!!? And why shouldn't he!!? What's he supposed to do!!? Sit at home talking to the plants like his daft Dad!!? Come off it, Mr Pressman!! Get a life – and let Harry have one!!? Geddit!!?!!?

■ **WHAT** A right royal disgrace!!? Prince Harry I'm talkin' about stoopid!!? The future King of England a-booizin' and a-schmoozin' all night long in a seedy Soho dive full of hoorays and

Tarts!!? And to top it all he thinks he's Frank Bruno and lashes out at a poor photographer who's only doing his job!!? Come on it Prince Ginger Nut!! Get a life – before they put you away for life!!?!!? Geddit!!?!!?

■ **WHY CAN'T** they leave old films alone!!? Now they've redone 'Alfie' and what a mess it is – not that I've seen it!!? What was wrong with the last one, I'd like to know!!?!!? And super-sexy Michael Caine beats boring Jude Law anyway!!?!!?!!? All together now, 'What's it all about Alfeeeeeee!!?!!?

■ **HATS OFF** to Jude Law!!? He's the super-sexy new Alfie who's got the gals a-gaspin' and a-gaggin'!!? We'd all got sick of the old film with dreary old has-been Michael Caine who can hardly speak English properly!!? (Not a lot of people know that!!? – Geddit!!?) Now at last we can enjoy the film all over again – not that I've seen it. All together now, 'Hey Jude, what's it all about!!?!!?!!'

■ **HERE** they are – Glenda's Halloween Hunks:

● General Sir Michael Jackson – You can come round to my place but I won't guarantee you'll be home by Christmas!!?

● Bishop Sebag Montefiore – You want to go nuclear do you?? Try it with Auntie Glenda, your Holiness, and we can go into meltdown!!?

● Grayson Perry – He's the prizewinning transvestite potter!!? Pop in to see me, dearie, and I'll lend you a nice frock!!?

Byeeeeee!!!

News in Brief NEW HEALTH PLAN

THE GOVERNMENT has revealed its latest strategy for wiping out the MRSA bug from Britain's NHS hospitals.

"We're going to turn them all into foundation hospitals like Bradford Teaching Hospital. That way, within six months they'll all be bankrupt and have to close their doors, thus completely protecting patients from coming into contact with the superbug," said a jubilant Health Secretary, John (cont. p. 94)

BBC SHOCK

THE BBC confirmed today that Dame Widow Twanky had resigned from the Board of Governors.

"Dame Widow Twanky bought considerable needlework, prize-winning preserves, freshly-baked scones and sponge fingers to the BBC, and her acknowledged expertise at doing whatever Number 10 and Alastair Campbell told her to do will be sorely missed," insisted a senior BBC (cont. p. 94)



DIARY

20 years ago, on 24 November 1984, a star-studded group of musicians assemble in a London studio to produce "Do They Know It's Christmas?". We all know about Bob Geldof but what about the others?

Francis Rossi, Status Quo: It was crazy. A really crazy day. There were shitloads of drugs – coke, dope, all sorts. Everyone was going bananas, and it was all for charity.

Rick Parfitt, Status Quo: It was, like, totally bananas. Y'know what I mean? Those yellow things, y'know, fruity things, with a bit of a curve in them. Mushyish. Thas right. Bananas. That's what it was like, man. Totally bananas.

Francis Rossi: Rick was so out of it he ate his first microphone, so we got him another.

Cliff Richard: Bono and Sting and George Michael were in the front row, which was great, really. Then in the next row there was really fantastic guys, perhaps not so trendy maybe but still truly fantastic, like Phil Collins and Paul Weller. Next row back was Adam Ant and Marilyn. Superb. Me? I was just a little bit behind the sixth row – bringing up the rearguard, you might say! Fine by me! No, you're right, there wasn't much of me in the video, but of course it's my left ear you see in that that close up of those lovely ladies from Bananarama, bless 'em.

Rick Parfitt: The song was called *Do They Know It's Christmas?* What kinda totally bananas name is that? Everyone knows Christmas isn't in November! Dur! Christmas is in, y'know, whenever. It's a proven fact.

Harvey Goldsmith, concert promoter: So that got Live Aid started. Bob had to play some tricks to get the artists involved. Like, he told each of them they'd be headlining. So when they came onstage one by one for that final song – well, if looks could kill.

Noel Edmonds, TV presenter: We all pulled together for Live Aid. I had a helicopter company based in Battersea at the time, and we were gonna be shuttling the big stars back and forth, the others could get the tube. I thought it would be a truly superb idea to have Mr Blobby as the pilot. You know the sort of thing – "This is your pilot speaking – Captain Blobby from Crinkley Bottom!!" Brilliant! Remember, these were the very earliest days of Blobby, and it would have been a truly fabulous showcase for him, as well as helping to bring a very great deal of much-needed publicity to the starving children of Africa.

But the powers-that-be wouldn't go along with it – whisper it not, my liege, but my proverbial little bird tells me there were



MEMORIES OF LIVE AID

somewhat large egos involved!

Rick Parfitt: It was a day when, no matter how young or like not young you were, you remembered where you was. I'll never forget where I was. I was in like Christ, man, where was I?

Francis Rossi: You was onstage.

Rick Parfitt: Yeah? Well, it was a long time ago. Can't be expected to remember everything.

Brian May, guitarist, Queen: We weren't doing it for ourselves, we were all into the cause. Freddie had this picture of a starving child stamped on his crotch and it was surrounded by diamonds, it meant that much to him.

Bono, lead singer, U2: It was a great opportunity for people who just happened to be famous and were, for the most part, hugely distinguished in their chosen field to tell ordinary people, who were perhaps less distinguished, how to spend their money.

Madonna, singer: Jack Nicholson, Cher, Dustin Hoffman – everyone was backstage at Philadelphia, and we were all congratulating each other on our great sets.

I guess there were lots of people in front of the stage too or just stuck at home. Whatever. We kept telling them to send their money in. We'd done our bit, and it was time they did theirs.

Cliff Richard: Rula Lenska and Dennis Waterman were backstage at Wembley. Robin Nedwell. Anita Harris. Magnus Pyke. The lot.

Brian May: Freddie Mercury had a real feeling for Africans, and it was a feeling that remained with him to the end. He even insisted that the dwarfs in white g-strings at his 35th birthday he hired to carry round lobsters on gold dishes on their heads should all be Africans.

Francis Rossi: I watched The Who from the side of the stage and it was obvious they weren't getting on very well from the way when the cameras were

panning out over the audience they kept kicking and pinching each other.

Rick Parfitt: Right. Didn't their drummer, old Moony, die that day?

Francis Rossi: Nah. He was already dead.

Rick Parfitt: Really? Blimey, he hid it well. But then the bloke was always totally bananas!

Noel Edmonds: Of course, not all the acts stayed top names, which might've been a bit of a downer on the forthcoming DVD. But the glory of modern technology is that you can edit out the Howard Joneses and Nik Kershaws of this world with the flick of a switch, and if anyone's bothered to ask them I guess they won't mind a bit, after all, its not about who's famous or not, it's for the greater cause. And let's face it, who wants to listen to Nik Kershaw when there's lives at stake?

Noel Edmonds: The great shame is that over the next few years Mr Blobby was set to grow really mega, mega huge. By the end of the 80's Blobby was bigger than all of them, and if only he was on the DVD now then they'd be making a helluva lot more money for charity. In my humble opinion, The Blobby Song would've been a truly memorable way to end the whole show. Talk about lost opportunities for the people of Africa. But don't say I didn't warn them.

Phil Collins, drummer: I'd just come offstage from drumming at Wembley, then I flew by Concorde to Philadelphia and carried on drumming there, which all went to show the children of the world just what a brilliant luxury airplane Concorde really was.

Elton John, singer: It was a day of love and peace, with everyone putting their egos firmly to one side in the drawer marked Ladies Underwear (stop it, mother!) and pulling together for a common cause. Though to be honest I found Bryan Ferry's set just that teensy bit disappointing, and what DID Alison Moyet think she was wearing, I mean honestly?!?! And that Mick Jagger's certainly no spring chicken, is she? George Michael and I sang "Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me". Someone told me later that the two of us raised more money than all the others put together, but it's not something I go on about.

Francis Rossi: It was a bananas day.

Rick Parfitt: Bananas for Africa! I like it!

Francis Rossi: I like it, I like it, I like it! Rockin' all over the world!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER



Literary Review

Faded genes

The Ancestor's Tale

Richard Dawkins

(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £25)

PROFESSOR Richard Dawkins has made a name for himself as an arch-Darwinian, a high priest, even Pope (in every sense a higher primate) of evolutionary biology. The problem is, he has become very boring about it.

In psychiatric terms, he is displaying some of the symptoms of post-messianic mania. He has seen the light, but no one else seems to have grasped it. In his dreams he must run up and down the street, sometimes quadrupedally, vestigial tail a-twitching, bellowing out the fossilised facts about our common ancestry with the dung beetle, the common fly, the flu virus et al, and no one's all that bothered. They're all indoors watching telly.

Time and again he propounds his inherited thesis. The basic idea, or meme, remains the same; but the carrier has been subjected to various mutations in an attempt to find the one most fitted to survive the process of replication in book form. There was *The Selfish Gene* (even altruism is unconsciously directed towards survival of the carrier's own sub-puddle of the gene pool), *The Blind Watchmaker* (what looks like a divine plan is merely a catalogue of accidents), *River Out of Eden*, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, and so forth.

Though each is a slight refinement of its predecessor, and data are added and updated, these books are basically all replications of the original idea. The latest in the series is bigger and glossier and fatter. But is it fitter?

The conceit this time is to set the time machine chugging gently backwards and to meet in a series of "rendezvous" along a dateline measured in hundreds of millennia the common ancestors shared with a succession of ever remoter cousins. We begin with the "concestor" (a word specially devised for this book) we share with our cousins, the apes; then that shared by both us and the apes with monkeys, and so forth, or rather back. At some point there must have existed a common ancestor of all presently existing life forms. The mind boggles (which is what it was designed to do). But there it is: the Grand Unifying Theory. It isn't the meaning of life, of course. It is merely an explanation for it.

Dawkins is fairly famous for not having much truck with God. He is presumably too intelligent to judge the entire Judeo-Christian tradition by the idiocies of a few born again creationists, but the possibility that evolution may have been one of the mysterious ways in which a Creator moved, His wonders to perform, cuts no ice

with him. Faced with the sheer "improbability" of the idea his mind strains to swallow what is after all, given the vast expanding improbability of the universe itself, a conceptual gnat. His grand unifying theory is a *reductio ad invisibilium*.

It is rather curious, though, how in all his exultant atheism Dawkins nevertheless can't help latching on to the language of belief. The book is presented as a "pilgrimage", with various species telling their tales on the way. But a pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred shrine undertaken for devotional reasons. He describes fossils as "relics", thereby lending them the air of devotional objects, to be revered as missing links between man and that "origin of life" for which he has embarked on this "quest". When he fumes about the way certain "irreplaceable relics in the Baghdad museum" were "vandalised in 2003 under the indifferent eyes of American invaders whose priorities led them to protect the Ministry of Oil instead", it is almost as though a cathedral has been desecrated.

Even what he calls human-centrism gets his goat. He regards the idea of *homo sapiens* as the end-product of a glorious long march out of the primordial swamp, each generation more noble and erect than its predecessor, as "vain-glorious". To look for the earliest human ancestor is "silly". He reminds us that "individuals matter only as vehicles of gene survival" and finds "insulting human dignity" to be "good for a laugh in my experience."

By reversing time's arrow, he rubs our noses in the fact that our ancestors were basically dirt. Remember man that thou art dust, in other words. Well, some of us knew that already.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS Pt 94

The Plot Against America

Philip Roth

(Cape £16.99)

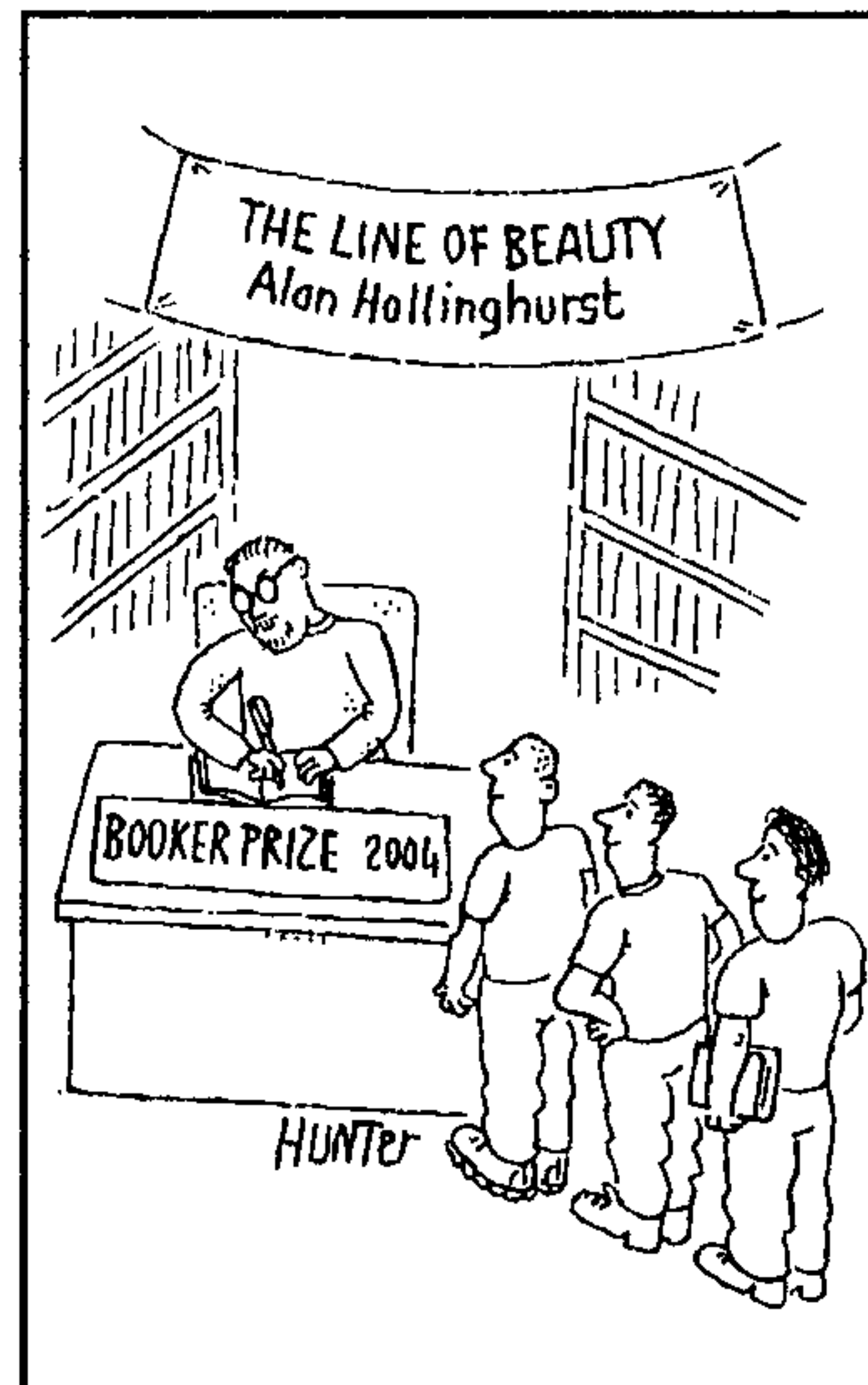
WE WERE a happy family in 1940, living there on the edge of Newark, New Jersey, not far from the landscaped splendour of Dullsville Park, whose boating lake, golf course, chipmunk enclosure, soda dispensary, race track, beauty parlour and high-class dry-cleaning emporium separated the Cucamonga section from the industrial plants and the shipping terminals of Tallahassee Road West, and the factories and warehouses, some large, others small, others somewhere in between, that lined Route 27 east of that and the burgeoning airport east of that and the rest of America a bit more east of that and... [continues]

The men worked fifty, sixty, seventy, sometimes as many as seventy-one or even seventy-two hours a week. The women worked

all the time, washing, iron, mending, sewing, clearing sinks, stoves, floors, chairs, knives, forks, spoons, swings, roundabouts, while simultaneously attending to their children's health, clothing, eyes, teeth, ears, noses, cleanliness, discipline, morale, morality, ups, downs, ways, means, planes, trains and automobiles... [continues]

Then the Republicans nominated George W. Bush [surely "Lindbergh"? - Ed.] and everything changed.

It was at about this time that I fell out of bed at 2am. It was a nightmare, sure enough, and about my stamp collection. Looking at my 1934 Grand Ole American National Parks set of ten I began to scream. Yosemite in California, Grand Canyon in Arizona, Old Smokey Bacon in Cucamonga, Mount Mooseburger in Utah, Lake Hominy, Tennessee, Fraggles Rock, Minnesota... [continues] Across the face of each, across, the cliffs, the woods, the rivers, the peaks, the geysers, the gorges, the popcorn parlours and the souvenir shacks, the tall trees and the blue skies, and across everything in America that was the bluest and greenest and whitest and reddest and brownest and pinkest and yellowest was printed the face of Dick Cheney [Surely "a black swastika"? - Ed.]



THE NEOPHILIACS

"How long before slow food becomes the new fast food?" - *Independent*.

"It's official - genealogy is the new TV property porn." - *Guardian*.

"Robbie Williams - the new Diana." - *the Times*.

"Girls are the new men." - Film director Pawel Pawlikowski, *Guardian*.

"Apple green is the new pink." - *Guardian*.

"Getting pregnant is 'the new yoga'." - *Daily Telegraph*.

"Outsourcing investment management [is] the new 'black' for the thinking financial planner." - *Investment Adviser*.

"Is golf the new black?" - DJ Spooky, Radio 1.



BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ WHEN Joan Collins claimed the producers of Channel 4's *Richard and Judy* had blocked her from promoting her new novel *Misfortune's Daughters* on ITV's rival *Paul O'Grady Show*, many newspapers carried the story but none picked up on the reason behind the strange edict.

Collins claimed that she was forced to pull out her appearance with O'Grady at the last minute, after the Richard and Judy mob threatened to blacklist all authors published by Robson Books. Robson Books is owned by Chrysalis. Cactus Television, which produces *Richard and Judy*, is also owned by Chrysalis. "Why supply a big-name guest to the opposition?" think Richard and Judy's producers. "Because we want to sell as many books as possible," thinks a miffed Robson. Look out for more corporate strong-arming within the Chrysalis group.

Meanwhile *Sun* hack-turned-shock jock Nick Ferrari took full advantage of his appearance as the *Evening Standard's* guest media columnist to highlight the Richard and Judy phenomenon.

Describing them as "the two powerhouse performers of Channel 4", he said that "they are to the world of book-publishing what Viagra is to the libido of an ageing male" before suggesting that Sainsbury's sign them up for an ad campaign to revive its flagging fortunes.

The impartial Ferrari is of course a regular guest on this televisual "powerhouse" and is also the breakfast show host on LBC, which is owned by... Chrysalis.

■ ONE of the autumn "highlights" from Simon & Schuster is *Star*, which purports to be a semi-autobiographical novel by former *Baywatch* babe and plastic surgery expert Pamela Anderson.

The story of a Florida girl who goes, almost over night, from working in a "nail and tan spa" to cover girl celebrity and star of popular TV series *Lifeguards Inc*, the book apparently "shows what really happens when A-list meets D-cup, when girl becomes goddess".

All frightfully interesting, but did she write a single word of it herself? The dust jacket blurb makes reference to her "ghostwriter" Eric Shaw Quinn, and in the acknowledgements Anderson thanks Shaw Quinn and two others "for their contributions to this book and for their faith in this project, which surpassed my own". Could it be that the actual creative contribution made by Shaw Quinn et al also surpassed Anderson's own?

It all seems reminiscent of Naomi Campbell's semi-autobiographical novel *The Swan*, which turned out to have been written by her editor Caroline Upcher. Ghost-written biographies are the norm, nowadays... but what's the point of a ghost-written novel?

Warballs

● In the same way that very few people a few years ago could have predicted that Saddam Hussein would be overthrown in Iraq, his statues dragged down by jubilant braying mobs, who would ever have predicted the toppling of *Cosmopolitan* as Britain's number one women's monthly? — **Periodical Publishers' Association conference.**

■ CREATIVE writing students will find the following story of how Tom Conti's novel *The Doctor* came to hit the bookshops extremely instructive.

Conti told the Hampstead and Highgate Express that his friend and near-neighbour, the songwriter Lynsey de Paul, had mentioned to her neighbour, publisher Jeremy Robson, that Conti was writing a novel.

Robson asked to see it and responded "with great enthusiasm". So if you really want to get published, be a well-known actor (most of Robson's authors are famous or infamous for things other than writing: Joanie, Michael Winner, Iain Duncan-Smith, Christine Hamilton, et al) and live around the corner from a star-struck publisher.

■ 1995, not long after Peter Cook's death, a group of fans got together to form the Peter Cook Appreciation Society and produce a regular fanzine, *Publish and Bedazzled*, which was largely devoted to digging out, transcribing and reproducing some of the more obscure gems from Cook's 40-year career – long forgotten television interviews, *Private Eye* flexidiscs, live appearances overseas and the succession of late night phone calls he made to London radio station LBC towards the end of his life.

In 2002 its editors Paul Hamilton and Peter Gordon were contacted by comedy critic and author William Cook (no relation), who had been commissioned to put together a compilation of Cook's work for Century (Random House). They provided him with copies of transcripts of 54 poems, lyrics, monologues, sketches and articles. When the book, *Tragically I Was An Only*

Twin, was finally published at the end of the year, they estimated that material they had provided made up about two-thirds of its contents.

Though Hamilton, who runs the society on a non-profit basis, says he never expected to be paid for the material, he did request an acknowledgement in the book because, as he puts it: "We thought we might get a few new subscribers out of it." Curiously no such acknowledgement appeared in the book – not that this stopped it becoming a best-seller. *Publish and Bedazzled*, however, folded earlier this year.

Last month members of the PCAS were surprised to find William Cook had edited a sequel, *Goodbye Again: The Definitive Peter Cook and Dudley Moore*, which claims to feature "virtually unknown material". And indeed it does – in fact, much of the material had only previously appeared in *Publish and Bedazzled*. One such item is unreleased material from the first Derek and Clive record which was supplied to Hamilton two years ago by the LP's recording engineer, which Cook highlights in the text "for the benefit of anyone obsessive enough to care". Once again, while Cook finds space to thank everyone from the Australian Broadcasting Commission to John Cleese, the Peter Cook Appreciation Society go unacknowledged.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"My father's father's father was a romantic Turkish politician who ran a small but distinguished conservative magazine, and whose career ended in a series of judgments that were romantic and certainly conservative, but unwise and sometimes reckless." — Boris Johnson, *Spectator*, 27 March 2004.

■ THE awarding of the Man Booker prize to Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* did not go unnoticed at that literary bastion the *Daily Express*, where Andrew Cunningham, "a doctor of literature and English teacher", declared that the judges "seem more and more intent on rewarding books which are perverse, miserable and not

destined for long-term popularity".

To demonstrate his thesis he provided a list of five books which he declared "would never have won the Booker prize in a million years" – and he was undeniably correct about three of them, since Laurie Lee's *Cider With Rosie* (a memoir), *The Wind in the Willows* (a children's book) and *The Lord of the Rings* (a trilogy published over two years) would not have been eligible for the award, which is open only to novels.

While Cunningham's view of L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* – "no social issues are dealt with at all here" – is questionable, his fifth choice, *Brideshead Revisited*, was even more peculiar. Cunningham points out that it could not possibly have won the prize because it is "set in Oxford and featuring rich toffs carrying teddy bears" – unlike Hollinghurst's book, which not only starts at Oxford but continues to analyze the lives of the wealthy upper classes for 300 pages and deliberately echoes Waugh's earlier novel.

Perhaps the parents who are currently paying £7,000 a term for Cunningham to teach their children at Charterhouse might like to suggest he spend more time bothering to read novels, and less bashing out rent-a-rant pieces for the *Express*, for whom this was his 21st contribution in the last year.

■ THE guide to "what's worth seeing and reading" in the latest issue of *The Week* finds only one book worthy of inclusion: the newly issued paperback of Jeremy Lewis's biography of Tobias Smollett.

By happy coincidence, Jeremy Lewis's daughter Jemima Lewis is consultant editor of... *The Week*.

■ MICHAEL Winner is, according to the press release for his new biography, "a colourful figure with a reputation for being outspoken... famous for shooting from the hip" who delivers "guaranteed acerbic comments aimed at those

FIRST DRAFTS

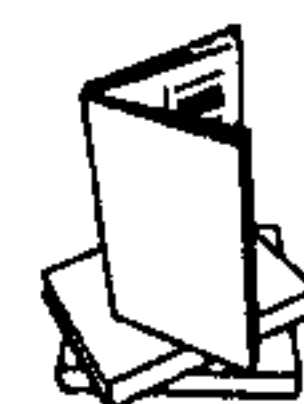


Wilkie Collins

who deserve them".

Given that the publicity department of Robson Books knew all this, it seems odd that no one actually managed to ensure that any copies of *Winner Takes All: A Life of Sorts* were supplied to the Chiswick branch of Waterstone's ahead of the great man's signing appearance there on 17 October. A witness reports that "the walls are still echoing".

'Bookworm'



LIBRARY NEWS

■ SURREY libraries are to stop stocking magazines after a survey of visitors found that "63 percent never read magazines" at the library.

Maybe the library bosses need a subscription to *Significance* (a magazine dedicated to statistics), since that's almost a whopping two-fifths of people coming through their doors who will pick up a magazine. Surely only the Mills & Boon shelf gets more visitors than the periodicals rack.

With many glossy magazines on popular topics such as computers, home improvement and photography costing more than £3 an issue, the library is the only place where many people can access them. Cancelling the magazines will save the county around £35,000.

It takes a lot of courage and skill to go hunting. It must be rather like the atmosphere in the trenches.

LUCY FERRY
Daily Mail



The first wave of punk in Britain, between 1976 and 1977, was arguably the single most important cultural revolution to occur in Britain since the height of Modernism in the 1920s.

MICHAEL BRACEWELL
The Times

Pseuds Corner

Never again will there come a time when the business of buying a record by Albert Ayler felt, as it felt 40 years ago, like an act of insurrection.

RICHARD WILLIAMS
Guardian

For 'Rubbish Bag in Wanking Corner' (1999) Schneider himself crouched in the bag of the title for seven hours, all-seeing but invisible, and nobody ever knew he was there. 'Die Familie Schneider', his new show in London, features living, breathing, wanking people and represents a startling, and hugely risky, change of direction.

GORDON BURN
Guardian

Pseuds Corporate

The Beck's brand connects with consumers through its distinctive and edgy communication, through its unique icons and properties, including the Beck's key – symbolizing consumer's empowerment to unlock their own destinies – as well as through urban fashion and music events round the world.

From the Interbrew website

'ISIS', aptly named after the ancient Egyptian goddess of fertility, will see the birth of 209 two bedroom apartments from George Wimpey's popular range. ISIS represents the feminine aspects of life such as creation, rebirth, love and intuition, all factors which George Wimpey see as being part and parcel of not only designing, but living in new homes.

From At Home in Cardiff Bay

CONTRIBUTORS: Rachel Pegg, M. Solan, M. Angulu, Scott Slorach, Mark Jones, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

PFI

Shaky foundations

BARELY weeks old and the financial position of foundation hospitals already looks uncertain.

The independent regulator has just demanded urgent action from Bradford teaching hospitals to remedy a £4m deficit – which the government won't stump up as doing so would make a mockery of the hospitals' independence from Whitehall. On the quiet, however, that independence has already been compromised in the interests of the all-important private finance initiative.

As foundation hospitals are not part of the department of health for financial purposes, any PFI contracts they have would not carry a government guarantee, leading to the fear that PFI companies would not commit to 20- or 30-year deals with them. The solution was simple: the DoH recently issued guarantees for all foundation hospitals with PFI deals, and will do so for all future PFIs. So if the hospital goes bust, other creditors might be left in the lurch but the PFI companies will get their money.

The message from the government to foundation hospitals is clear: you're on your own, except when it comes to PFI, when we're right behind you.

McCock-up

THE Norfolk & Norwich Hospital, one of the first private finance initiative schemes, almost went into the red this year but was saved by the failure of part of its PFI scheme.

Its original PFI agreement included a contract for computerisation with PFI consortium member

McKesson, an American firm. But the contract was cancelled this year. A legal settlement means the hospital cannot discuss the matter, but it is known that it was cancelled due to poor performance. The failure of this part of the PFI meant

McKesson had to pay £3.4m to the hospital trust – which prevented the hospital going more than £2m into the red.

The trust also took its IT staff back from the contractor, and a spokesman told the *Eye* that it did not believe this would cause financial problems. This suggests the NHS can do its own IT job cheaper than the contractor.

McKesson, a private health corporation based in California with a \$10bn turnover, has a host of problems with the NHS in Britain. Early this year Edinburgh Royal Infirmary dropped a 13-year, £30m computer contract with the company. Five years after the contract was signed, and two years after the system was due online, doctors and nurses still couldn't find patient records on McKesson's system. The firm agreed to leave the hospital and abandon the contract without payment.

More bad news may be on the way. McKesson is part of the national plan for NHS IT, a scheme whose ballooning costs are already worrying MPs. The firm is responsible for the £325m "electronic staff record" contract which, the government hopes, will save hospitals time and money by sharing computerised personnel and payroll details between hospitals. But McKesson's records system is already running late.

Who could have predicted McKesson's difficulties? Staff in Edinburgh certainly did. In 2002 one senior IT consultant working for the hospital resigned in protest at McKesson's failures. In the United States, meanwhile, McKesson was involved in a massive accounting fraud based on its IT wing.



ACCOUNTANCY

Full of beans

THE Institute of Chartered Accountants in England Wales (ICAEW), custodian of the profession's standards, values integrity above all else. "A member's advice and work must be uncorrupted by self-interest and not be influenced by the interests of other parties," says its guide to professional ethics.

No wonder, then, that the interests of the man in charge of the institute are causing concern among members. Last month ICAEW president Paul Druckman joined the board of accountancy software specialist Access Accounting Ltd. "I am excited to be joining the team at Access Accounting at a time when the company is highly profitable, well run, and looking forward to a great future," he enthused.

One of his first jobs was to puff the company's products, trading on his status as head of the accountancy profession, through the modestly-billed "Paul Druckman seminar" at a finance software show at the national exhibition centre last week.

Top priority for any accounting software developer like Access is to get accreditation for its products from, er, the ICAEW, which might be thought to give Mr Druckman the kind of conflict of interest that the government's accountancy regulator, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), would want to investigate. The fact that Druckman is also a director of the FRC will of course have no bearing on its readiness to do so and does not imply that supervision and regulation of the accountancy profession are anything less than ruthlessly impartial.

Brussels louts

MEANWHILE PriceWaterhouseCooper have been mounting an increasingly aggressive raid on the exchequer on the grounds that British tax rules breach European law.

A recent "survey" produced by the firm's international corporate tax partner, Peter Cussons, and splashed across the *Times* business section last week, claims that all 25 EU member states' tax systems break European law, with Britain allegedly the worst offender. The *Times* estimated that legal challenges of the sort orchestrated by PwC could eventually cost the government £20bn.

Most of the tax laws disputed by PwC are designed to prevent tax avoidance, but Cussons recommends that these should be disregarded in the interests of saving vast amounts of tax. "EU-based businesses should take appropriate action such as filing in accordance with the EC Treaty [ie ignoring British and other countries' tax laws]", urges Mr Cussons.

The PwC survey, distributed throughout Europe, should not, of course, be confused with a shameless attempt to drum up tax avoidance business at the expense of public finances (the same public finances that fund so much of the firm's consultancy work). In case of doubt, the phone number of PwC's top euro-tax dodger, Peter Cussons, is helpfully attached to the survey for anyone looking for further information.

PS: Parliament is now taking an interest in this scandal. Last week Tory peer Baroness Noakes, formerly of accountancy firm KPMG, warned to the theme. "If we are to bow to Brussels with regard to our tax laws, does the minister agree that that will open up another black hole in the government's finances, which will mean either that the golden rule will be bust through extra borrowing or that taxes will be raised?" she wondered. Absentmindedly milady neglected to declare an interest in the question. She is a director of ICI plc, which has signed up to one of the "group litigation orders" through which a number of multinationals are suing the government, citing European law, with the aim of forcing it to, er, bow to Brussels.

ARMS AND AID

IT REALLY IS NEPALLING

CAN ANYONE make sense of the British government's policies towards Nepal?

Defence secretary Geoff Hoon has been repeatedly criticised over the last two years for sending military hardware to the troubled kingdom under an aid plan that is supposed to promote peace, while the home office wants to send refugees back into the thick of Nepal's civil war despite strong evidence that they will be in danger.

Amnesty International reports many gross human rights abuses, including torture, extra-judicial killings and disappearances on both sides of the conflict, which sees the monarchy (or what's left of it after 10 of its members were gunned down by one of its own crown princes) fighting Maoist insurgents, but without the democratic support of parliament or cabinet, both of which were dismissed after the palace massacre.

Arun Raj Kunwar (pictured right), a member of the mainstream Nepal Congress party, fled to the UK after speaking at a demonstration against the coronation of Prince Gyanendra, the only survivor of the massacre and brother of the royal machine gunner. The demonstration was broken up by baton-wielding police.

A few months later the Congress member who arranged for Kunwar to address the demo, Depak Devkota, was also arrested; and local newspapers reported that police were seeking Kunwar. Two of his friends in the Congress party were then also arrested. According to the *Kathmandu Post*, they have been decapitated.

To bolster his asylum claim Kunwar produced a letter from Arjun Narasingha KC stating that

"Mr Kunwar faces threat on returning to Nepal he is not safe and secure in this present situation by some extremist group of people" [sic]. The letter carries weight because Narasingha KC is not only chief spokesman of the Congress party but a former MP and health minister in Nepal.

The UK immigration service doubted the veracity of the letter, however, and refused asylum. An appeal was lodged and campaigners hope the tide is turning, largely because the former Nepalese minister surprised officials by turning up at the British embassy in Kathmandu to confirm he really did write the letter and state: "If Mr Kunwar returns to Nepal in the present situation he is not safe."

Meanwhile Tham Sarki, a student member of the Maoist party, also fled Nepal after the 2001 events after he was involved in demonstrations demanding that lower class "Dalits" like himself should be allowed to worship at Hindu temples. The police seized one of his friends and issued a warrant for his arrest. But even a copy of the warrant didn't convince the UK home office that his claim was genuine. He is appealing.

The home office won't comment on specific cases but says it considers each case on its merits. It sets the bar high. Another Nepalese asylum seeker, Ang Sherpa, was deported this year. Her claim – based on the fact that the Nepalese army had already killed her husband, believing he was one of the insurgents, was rejected.





PRISONS

Brixton rapped

AN INQUEST jury has severely criticised standards of care in Brixton jail after hearing how a remand prisoner and known suicide risk was able to attempt suicide twice in two days. On the second occasion he was successful.

In May 2002 Terry Doyle, a withdrawing drug addict suffering severe depression, was placed in a shared cell. He was not under medical supervision, even though he was considered at risk. The following day, after his cell mate had left for afternoon exercise, 29-year-old Doyle tried to hang himself. He was only found because his cell-mate returned to the cell to fetch his cigarettes.

Despite this suicide attempt and Doyle's medical history, he was not moved to the health care wing; and the next day when his cell mate left for afternoon exercise, Doyle tried to hang himself again and succeeded.

The jury at Southwark coroner's court cited a long list of failures at the jail. These include the lack of preventative action after Doyle's first suicide attempt; lack of management; failure to properly assess and recognise the risk of suicide; an over-reliance on sharing of cells; inadequate staff training and failure to pass on crucial information about Doyle's detoxification regime. The jury's criticisms might have gone even further had it heard the full circumstances surrounding Mr Doyle's death.

For example, the coroner did not allow lawyers for Mr Doyle's family to tell the jury that his death was one of a "cluster" – the eighth in just over two years at the jail and double the national average. Moreover, he was the sixth Irishman to take their own life at Brixton (the four immediately before him were Irish too).

This cluster prompted questions in parliament,

complaints from the Irish government and calls for a public inquiry. There was concern about anti-Irish racism at the jail and the fact that significant numbers of staff had served in Northern Ireland, either in the forces or in prisons. There had already been a scathing report on the jail from the chief inspector of prisons and damning inquest verdicts on previous suicides.

But after Mr Doyle's death the prison service simply carried out an internal inquiry. This was conducted by the governor of neighbouring Wandsworth and called for disciplinary investigation into two officers who acted in a "discriminating and harassing" way towards Irish prisoners. But it concluded there was no evidence to link the men's deaths with their ethnicity, nor with staff with an armed forces background.

Curfew crimes

LAST WEEK teenager Ian Hartshorn (pictured) was jailed for life for stabbing a woman to death while he was supposedly under a home curfew order and wearing an electronic tag.

Hartshorn, 18, killed 69-year-old Florence Seccombe at Plymouth bus station where she was sleeping rough. On the day he was sentenced, Reliance, the private company that was supposed to be monitoring his curfew, lost its contract with the home office.

Napo, the probation union, and the courts have repeatedly complained about delays in fitting tags, sometimes days after sentence, delays in bringing offenders back to court for curfew breaches and poor communications with probation officers and courts. The cost of tagging – about £8,000 per offender per year – already far outstrips the costs of treatment programmes and straight probation orders. It seems it now provides little protection against serious crime.



PAROLE

Gray area

THOSE who protest their innocence while in prison continue to receive harsher treatment from the prison and parole board.

Steven Gray (pictured right) – a quietly spoken graduate in the third year of a seven-year sentence – was convicted of robbing a 94-year-old woman of £30 by posing as a priest from Newcastle Roman Catholic cathedral. He has just been refused a transfer to an open jail because he was told: "You have refused to address your offending behaviour."

Gray is currently in Wymott, a category C prison in Preston which holds large numbers of sex offenders. His exemplary behaviour record in jail would normally dictate that he would be moved to a low-risk open prison ahead of parole. But 32-year-old Gray, who has never been in any kind of trouble before and whose lawyers are preparing a case for the criminal cases review commission, has always protested his innocence.

There were certainly disturbing aspects to his trial in Newcastle in January 2002. Firstly, the victim Isabella Brown was not called to give evidence on the grounds that she was too frail – yet she attended a press conference after the trial. Judge Timothy Hewitt allowed her police statement to be read out, but the defence team was unable to challenge any of it during cross-examination. Nor was there an identification parade for her to identify Gray. She did not give any statement to police until after he had been arrested, raising concerns that she may have picked up her description of the robber – which fits Gray – from other sources.

Video cameras around the sheltered housing where Mrs Brown lived at the time do not show Gray to have been present and his claim that he was at work at the time and did not "sign-out"

until half an hour after the time of the offence has not been seriously disputed.

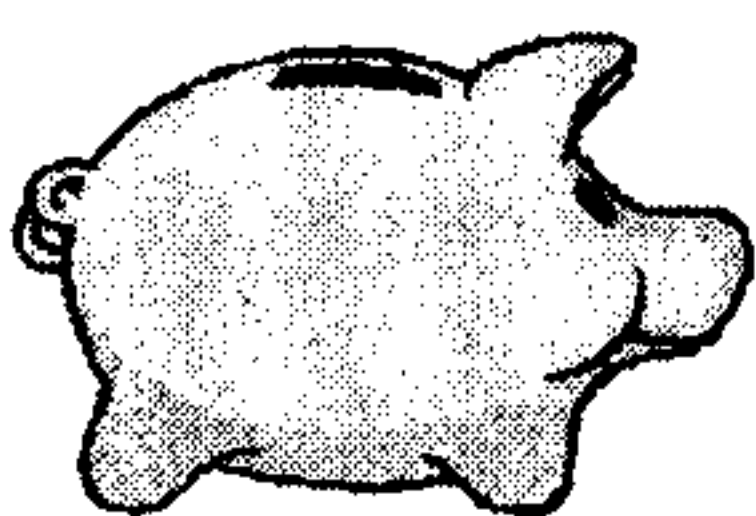
The robber, meanwhile, was said to have been wearing a cassock; and while Gray possesses one, he says he has had it since he was 12, serving first as a member of the church choir and then as an altar server.

Two MPs express concern about Gray's conviction – John Grogan, Labour MP for Selby, and Phil Willis, Lib Dem MP for Harrogate. Adding insult to the injury of a possible miscarriage of justice, Gray is likely to serve a year longer than other inmates simply for protesting his innocence.



LOOT! by 'Bruin'

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Average employee's salary

MMR



Banned Aid back

THE high court battle over the MMR vaccine looks set to move to the next stage after legal aid was restored to 11 of the families who are fighting the vaccine manufacturers in court.

In a blanket move earlier this year, aid was withdrawn from every child; but for 11 children that decision has now been reversed on appeal. None of the 11 children have been diagnosed with autism (by far the biggest number of claimants) but they include children suffering with other kinds of brain damage, as well as arthritis, bowel disease, epilepsy, encephalitis and transverse myelitis (an immune disorder affecting the central nervous system). Some of these are acknowledged, if rare, side effects of the triple vaccine.

One child to have his legal aid restored is Lewis Pickering, 15, who suffers from severe epilepsy. He had been a healthy toddler but eight days after his MMR jab, he suffered an allergic reaction – he had a rash over his entire body – and four weeks later suffered the first of the dreadful seizures that became worse and were to blight his life.

It was while Lewis was undergoing brain surgery in an attempt to stop these life-threatening seizures that the Pickerings found the evidence they believe links their son's condition to the triple jab. Vaccine strain measles virus was found in tissue from his frontal lobe and he was diagnosed with frontal lobe brain damage.

Although Lewis' mother Wendy is pleased to have her legal aid back to pursue her claim against the vaccine manufacturers, she is furious that it was stopped, and the action stalled, in the first place. "It was a waste of our time. It was quite clear that there had been a decision to stop all the cases, irrespective of their individual merits. I am quite convinced Lewis's case wasn't even looked at."

Francis Hamlyn, who at 20 is one of the older claimants, has also had his legal aid restored. In 1994, he was caught up in the controversial Operation Safeguard, in which seven million school-age children were given a combined measles and rubella MR shot in an attempt to head off a predicted measles epidemic. Francis was then 10, a keen cricketer and rugby player and a chorister at St George's, Windsor Castle. Four weeks after vaccination he started complaining about severe pains in one leg. Soon he was in agony and could barely walk. Tests showed that he had juvenile arthritis and his consultant registered it with the Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre as a side-effect of the vaccine.

Francis also started to develop severe bowel problems, since diagnosed as Crohn's disease, which led to the removal of large sections of his intestines. His mother Sue said: "My son's illness – initially crippling arthritis – was diagnosed 10 years ago by a consultant paediatrician as being caused by the vaccine. Our legal aid should never have been withdrawn."

The success of the 11 cases should now reopen the litigation door to many similar non-autistic cases – like that of Robert Fletcher, son of Jackie Fletcher who runs Jabs, the organisation which supports parents who believe their children have been damaged by vaccines.

Robert, who suffered a massive seizure 10 days after his MMR vaccination, is now severely epileptic and brain damaged. But his appeal to have legal aid restored was turned down – not on the merits of his case but because it was claimed that the appeal came outside a 14-day time limit.

But what of other families who share at least some similar factors to those of, say, Lewis Pickering? The measles virus found in his brain was also detected in his gut. Other children involved in the litigation were also found to harbour the measles virus in the gut. But because those children went on to develop what has been described as an atypical regressive form of autism, they are *not* to have their legal aid restored.



In the City

THERE has been considerable media sympathy for the three former NatWest bankers facing extradition to Texas on Enron-related charges of defrauding their ex-employer out of up to \$9m. Home secretary David Blunkett is due to decide shortly whether to confirm the Bow Street magistrate's decision that the trio should be tried in Houston.

Much of that sympathy is justifiably due to the one-sided nature of the new extradition agreement under which David Bermingham, Giles Darby and Gary Mulgrew would be exported. Thanks to Blunkett and Labour's bended-knee approach to Washington, US extradition requests are no longer subject to rigorous examination to prove there is a case to answer. So any American prosecutor looking to make vote-winning headlines at home can demand the effective extradition by return of British nationals – even if there is no real case.

Britain, on the other hand, will still have to fight all the way through the US legal system to extradite an American suspect.

Whether this unequal arrangement will survive a human rights challenge remains to be seen – especially given the sorry US record in imprisoning and executing the innocent on false or no evidence. If Blunkett agrees to the three bankers' extradition, theirs could be the first challenge to the new system.

Lost in much of the orchestrated protests about injustice have been the facts of the case. And as Bermingham himself admits: "The bare facts look horrible."

The three are accused of persuading NatWest to sell its interest in an Enron-linked Cayman Islands limited partnership at a massive under valuation to another Cayman limited partnership in which they were secret investors. Within weeks that hidden value was realised. They invested \$250,000 and walked away from NatWest with \$7.35m. "We are 100 percent innocent," declares Bermingham. A view echoed by Darby and Mulgrew, who all point to the lack of any action against them in Britain by NatWest, the financial services authority (FSA) or the Serious Farce Office. How much of that is due to the US getting there first is unclear.

The "bare facts" Bermingham admits are so "horrible" are set out in a 2002 affidavit from FBI agent Deanne Simpson, supporting their indictment.

The NatWest case revolves around one of the many special purpose vehicles created by former

Enron chief financial officer Andrew Fastow to boost profits and hide debt. LJM Cayman was a limited partnership run by Fastow and his able aide Michael Kopper. Its partners were Campsie, owned by Greenwich NatWest (GNW), and ERNB, owned by Credit Suisse First Boston. Each invested \$7.5m. GNW was the structured finance subsidiary of NatWest. It was run by Mulgrew. Darby and Bermingham worked under him. GNW had done a large number of profitable deals with Enron. NatWest is said to have made \$20m from selling Enron shares held by LJM Cayman.

LJM Cayman created a subsidiary LJM Swap Sub to arrange derivatives covering Enron's shares in Rhythms NetConnections after it was floated in 1999. The aim was to protect Enron against any sharp fall in the internet company's share price during the period when it could not sell. Campsie and CSFB invested in Swap Sub which was funded by cash and Enron shares. Because Enron had an option to sell the Rhythms shares to Swap Sub at above the market price, GNW valued its stake at zero.

The US prosecution case is that in early 2000 the trio knew GNW was likely to be sold as a result of the takeover of NatWest by Royal Bank of Scotland. They therefore entered into a scheme with Fastow and Kopper involving the sale of the Swap Sub limited partnership which would rip off both NatWest and Enron.

The prosecution claims Fastow, Kopper and the GNW Three agreed a

restructuring plan for Swap Sub under which NatWest would sell its interest to a new Cayman partnership called Southampton for \$1m. Fastow and Kopper plus two other Enron execs were secret investors in Southampton. Fastow and Kopper agreed the British bankers would have an option to purchase 50 percent of the new limited partnership for \$250,000. Fastow then persuaded Enron to unravel Swap Sub resulting in a payment to the three bankers of \$7.35m for an investment acquired two weeks earlier for \$250,000. Fastow, Kopper and others shared \$12.3m.

So far so "horrible". But it gets worse. For the prosecution rely on a number of emails between the players which are, to say the least, ambiguous.

On 29 January 2000 Bermingham – a director of Campsie, the GNW investor in LJM Cayman – told his boss Darby that he felt the NatWest stake in Swap Sub had considerable value. "The trick will be in capturing it. I have a couple of ideas but it may be good if I don't share them with anyone until we know our fate!!!"

By February discussions with Fastow were well advanced for the sale. On 20 February Bermingham told Mulgrew, referring to Fastow's wish to make \$25m on the deal: "I will be the first

to be delighted if he has found a way to lock it in and steal a large portion for himself... We should be able to appeal to his greed." The next day Bermingham emailed Mulgrew and Darby: "Large numbers of people are asking what we are up to. I hate lies." Bermingham told a colleague that Mulgrew and Darby were going to Houston to do the deal but his colleague should "not speak to anyone" and "just act dumb please".

The three British bankers met Fastow and Kopper in Houston on 22 February to discuss a number of options for the Swap Sub sale. One was rejected as it was "too obvious what is happening so probably not attractive". On 26 February Mulgrew emailed Bermingham regarding the tax consequences of the proposed deal: "I understand (it's so much easier to focus when it's your own dough)."

On 1 March Bermingham emailed Mulgrew and Darby about the proposed sale by NatWest for \$1m that another employee was aware of the deal but "he does NOT know anything about NewCo or our personal aspirations". "NewCo" is assumed by prosecutors to be a reference to the Southampton limited partnership which was to take over Swap Sub and in which they would have a 50 percent interest.

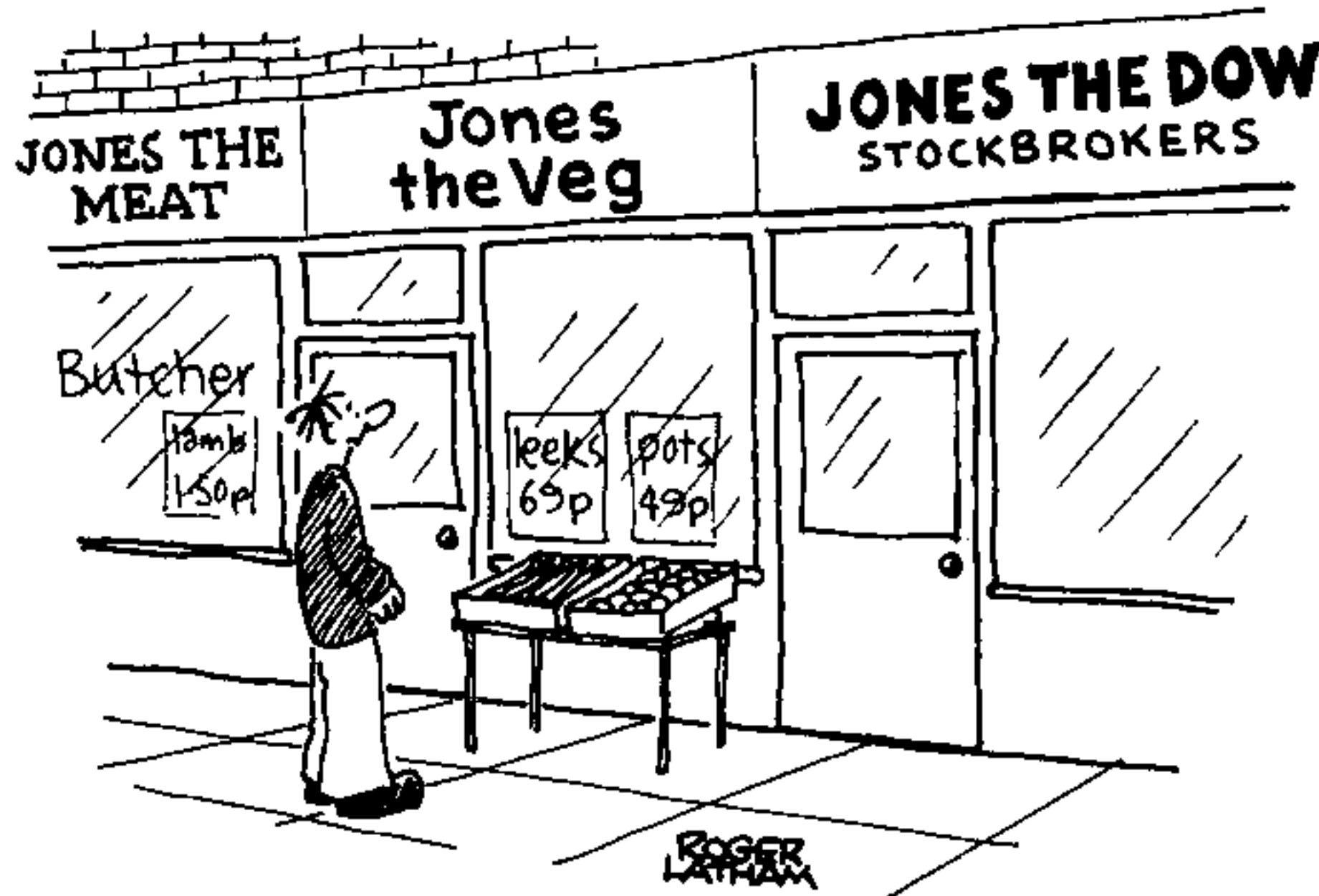
The \$1m sale was agreed by the Campsie board on 3 March after a presentation by Darby. Mulgrew then confirmed acceptance of the \$1m offer from Kopper. On 14 March in New York Bermingham and Kopper drafted an agreement giving the British bankers an option to purchase Southampton K Co which was to own half the Southampton partnership buying Swap Sub. Three days later Campsie sold its half share of Swap Sub for \$1m while CSFB sold its 50 percent for \$10m – a big favour by Fastow to CSFB which was one of Enron's most accommodating bankers.

On 19 March Bermingham gave four weeks' notice to NatWest. The next day the trio signed the Southampton K option agreement with Kopper. Three days later Enron agreed to pay Swap Sub \$30m in return for the right to sell the Rhythms shares and get back the Enron shares.

On 17 April Darby announced his resignation from NatWest. On 20 April Bermingham ceased to be a NatWest employee. Within 24 hours he and the others told Kopper they were exercising the option to buy into Southampton. On 25 April Mulgrew transferred \$250,000 to Bermingham's account to fund the option purchase. Two days later Kopper sold shares in the Southampton K partnership to Bermingham who the same day gave Darby and Mulgrew the option to buy one-third each. On 1 May the Southampton K partnership controlled by the three bankers received \$7.35m from Enron.

In June 2000 Mulgrew resigned from NatWest. On 31 July Bermingham directed \$2.38m be paid to Darby who had left NatWest the same day. On 8 August a similar sum was directed by Bermingham to Mulgrew's bank account.

The prosecution case is that GNW and NatWest knew little or nothing of the deal which made their



THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

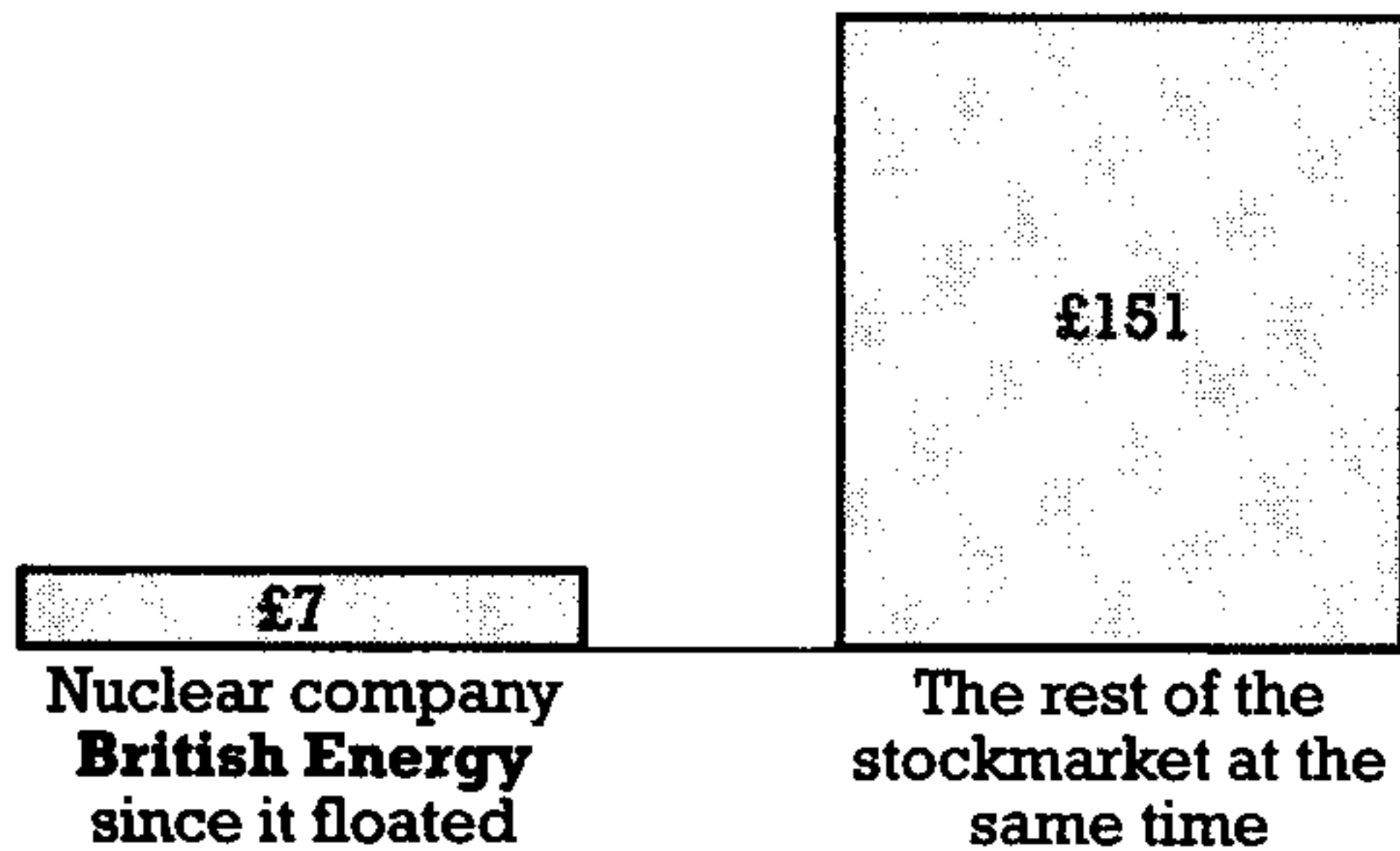


Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Doesn't really inspire confidence, does it?

Value of £100 invested in...



three ex-employees \$7m and breached their compliance procedures. The only disclosure – despite the bank's policies on personal dealing and avoiding conflicts of interest – they say was made by Bermingham in March 2000 when he referred to a limited partnership for films and other projects.

"Horrible" indeed. But the three bankers insist they can explain everything and that they did nothing wrong which, they maintain, is shown by the absence of any action against them by their purported victim, NatWest.

Bermingham, Darby and Mulgrew hold the dubious distinction of being the first to be indicted over the Enron scandal in June 2002. At that time it was assumed that, in typical American style, the plan was to force them to give evidence against the real target – Fastow. But if there were any discussions these went nowhere, perhaps because all three were in Britain and felt safe.

If so that went out the window after first Kopper in August 2002 and then Fastow in January this year cut plea bargains with the Feds promising to testify against their former colleagues, including chief executive Jeff Skilling and chairman Ken Lay, in return for lighter sentences. Kopper has started delivering on his deal by testifying against former Merrill Lynch bankers in an ongoing Houston trial.

With Fastow and Kopper on board the prosecutors did not need the three Brits; so in April, after almost two years, they began extradition proceedings. If they are extradited, Bermingham, Darby and Mulgrew will presumably face Fastow and Kopper giving evidence about how they all conspired to defraud their respective employers. That evidence might not be available in a British court as Fastow and Kopper – both going away for several years – would only be video witnesses. That may explain the reluctance of the FSA and SFO. Either way it would seem at the very least the three British bankers have some explaining to do before they can be declared victims of injustice.

IT IS almost two years since the SFO raided the Jersey offices of the Orb group in search of £33m removed from cash shell Izodia by convicted fraudster Gerald Smith and friends. Given the seemingly clear cut nature of the Izodia robbery and Orb's inability to repay, it might have been thought that charges would have happened by now. However, the SFO's task may not have been made any easier if rumours that Smith has departed Jersey possibly for Argentina turn out to be true.

SHAREHOLDERS and fans of Liverpool are wondering if there is any connection between the *Financial Times'* continued trumpeting of the £100m takeover plans for the premiership club of non-Hollywood moguls Mike Jefferies of Milkshake Films and Stuart Ford, their planned football film *Goal* due out next year, the involvement in *Goal* as executive producer of PR man Peter Hargitay, special adviser to FIFA president Sepp Blatter, and Hargitay's claimed close relationship with the *FT* for whom Blatter is a columnist.

'Slicker'

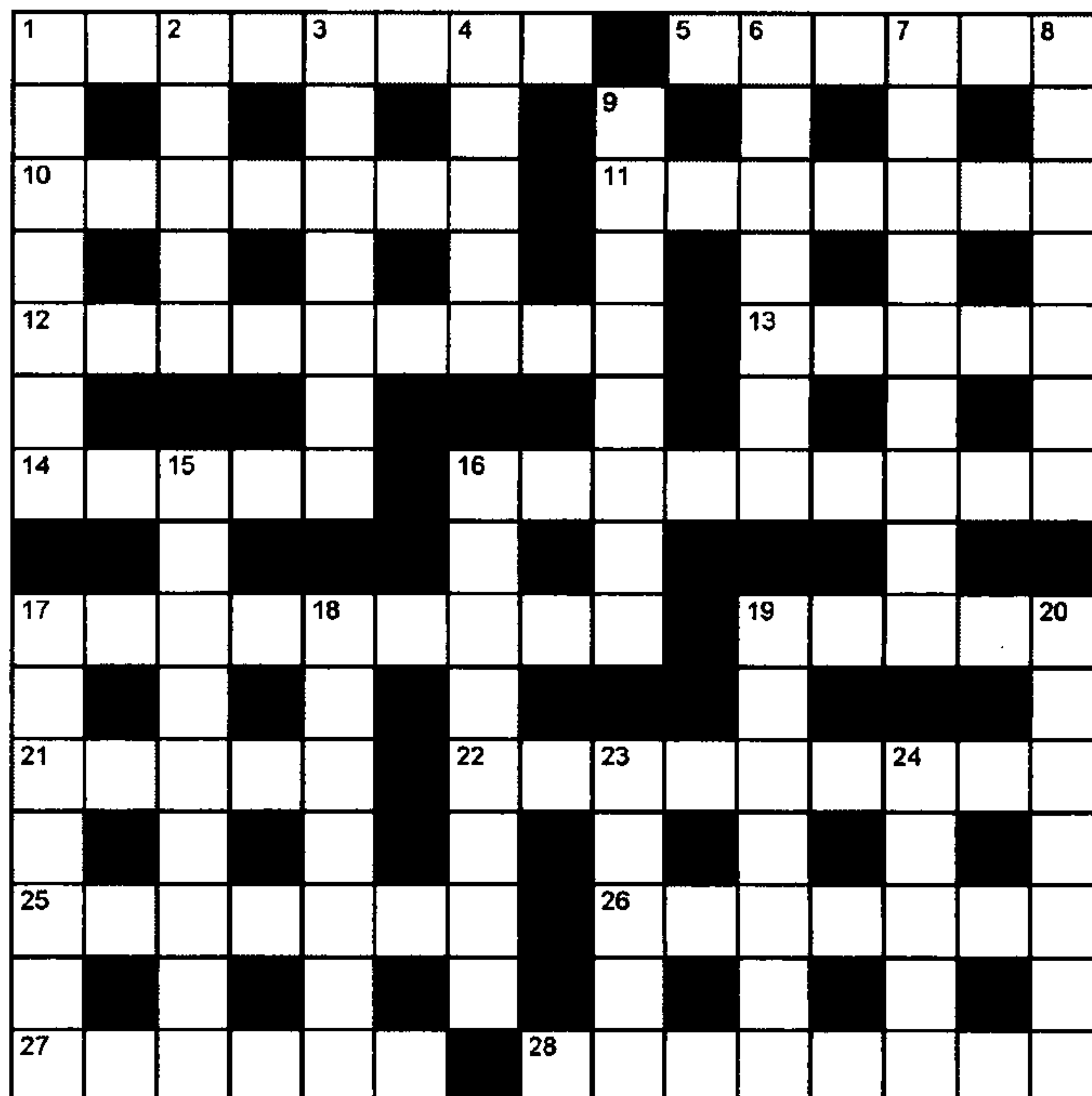
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ACROSS

- 1 Awful pap, conclusion to one Times supplement (8)
- 5 "When one gets rotten maths it's a far from jolly wheeze" (6)
- 10/16ac. "I have your well-being at heart", as the spin practitioner might seek to reassure you? (5,2,2,1,6)
- 11 Am under-stimulated, like Venus de Milo (7)
- 12 Inept, pointless Michael's suppressing corporate stink (9)
- 13 See 21
- 14 "Blasé" is new "black" (5)
- 16 See 10
- 17 First impressions of *Eats F-all & Stays* (L. Truss): "pisspoor", "a bit of a strain" (9)
- 19 Obscure bloke getting end away since becoming a traitor (5)
- 21/13 Cyclops's flipping good French tip for a full chest (10)
- 22 Piss artist around local (hic!) getting round in (9)
- 25 Rockers "on job", screwed a Latin number (3,4)
- 26 In which to launder cash (Western not Chinese capital) with VAT added (7)
- 27 Nice gaff according to agents involved in Grade's resignation (3,3)

28 Given the Dame Judi treatment – about right for right wet? (8)

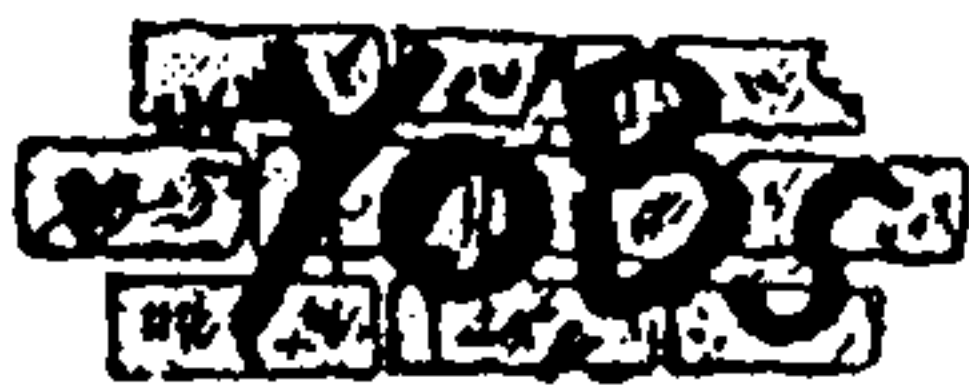
DOWN

- 1 Luvvies' ecstasy taking off drawers (7)
- 2 She gives Gazza one (5)
- 3 Worthy getting tossed on flat surface (7)
- 4 Thought by Labour's leader "Such things can't get any better" (5)
- 6 Start to stroke thigh and shit – it could get you in a lather (7)
- 7 It's awkward when I'm shafted/tossed (9)
- 8 Accountant's balls-up entered under "Car" (7)
- 9 Just the thing for those on benders? (3,5)
- 15 How to describe Kate Moss's *Essential Facts?* (4,5)
- 16 To jog, if in drag, is hardly decorous (5,3)
- 17 In which there are drills to get top tennis player to shag (7)
- 18 Of fatso proportions in tailored jeans in California (3,4)
- 19 Elton's now playing Boris! (7)
- 20 Becks, Di – off trolley, quite possibly? (7)
- 23 Objectionable woman, Brenda makes you cringe (5)
- 24 Camilla's entrance, well into strip – secure the door! (5)

Crossword 272 winner: ANTHONY TOMKINS

ACROSS: 8 Super loo 9 Visual 10 Uncut 11 Going bust 13 Absurdity 14 Bijou 16 Rule out 19 Longbow 21 Totty 23 Tony Blair 26 Dog-eat-dog 27 Lydia 28 Bottle 29 John Bull.

DOWN: 1 Issue a writ 2 Spices 3 Oratorio 4 Mowgli 5 Big gob 6 Put-up-job 7 Clot 12 Idyll 15 Unworkable 17 Litigate 18 Toted 20 Nobbling 22 Yearly 24 No good 25 Ardour 26 Dubs.



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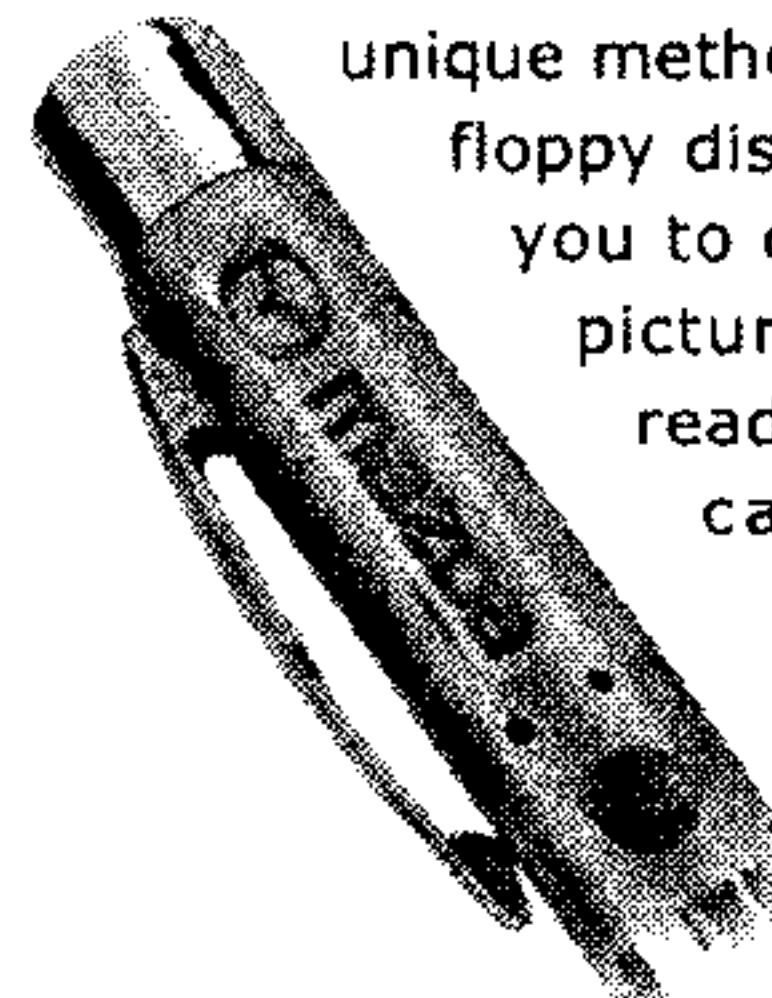


Disk Pen

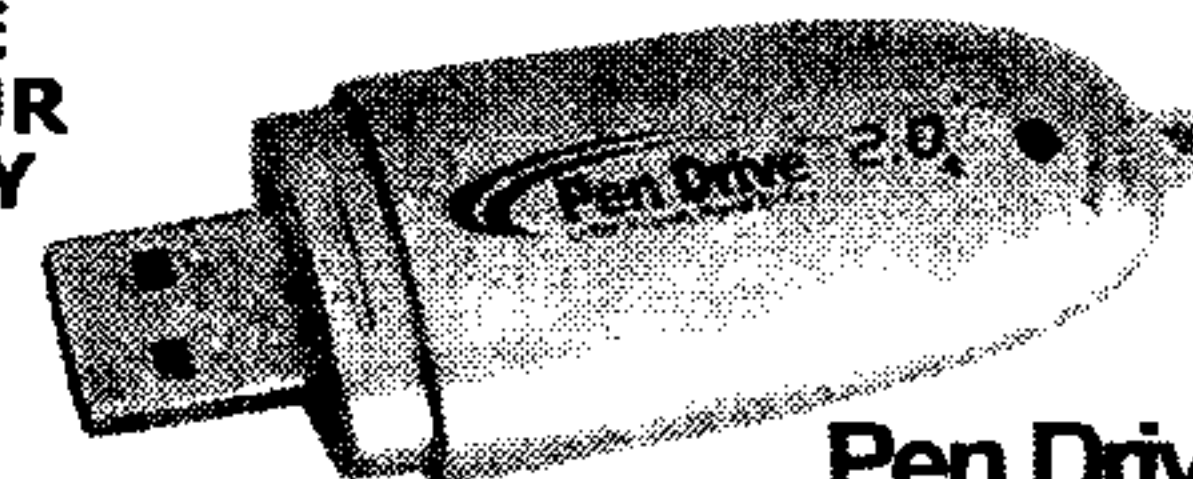
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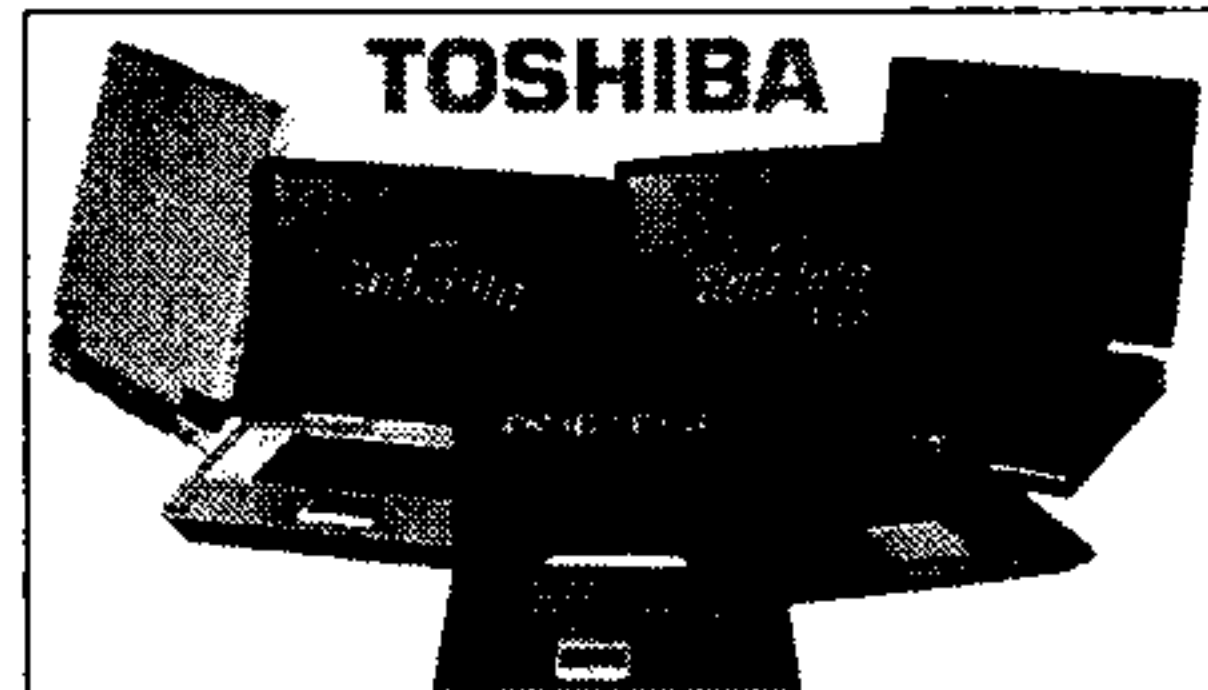
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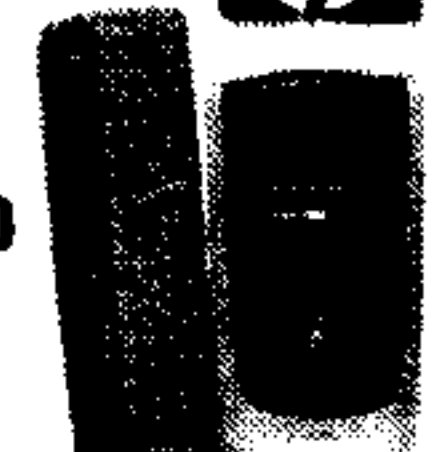
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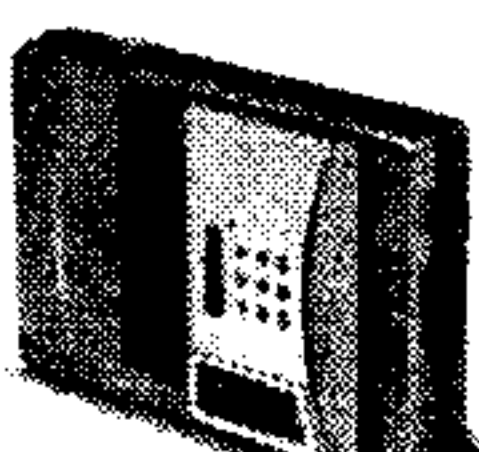
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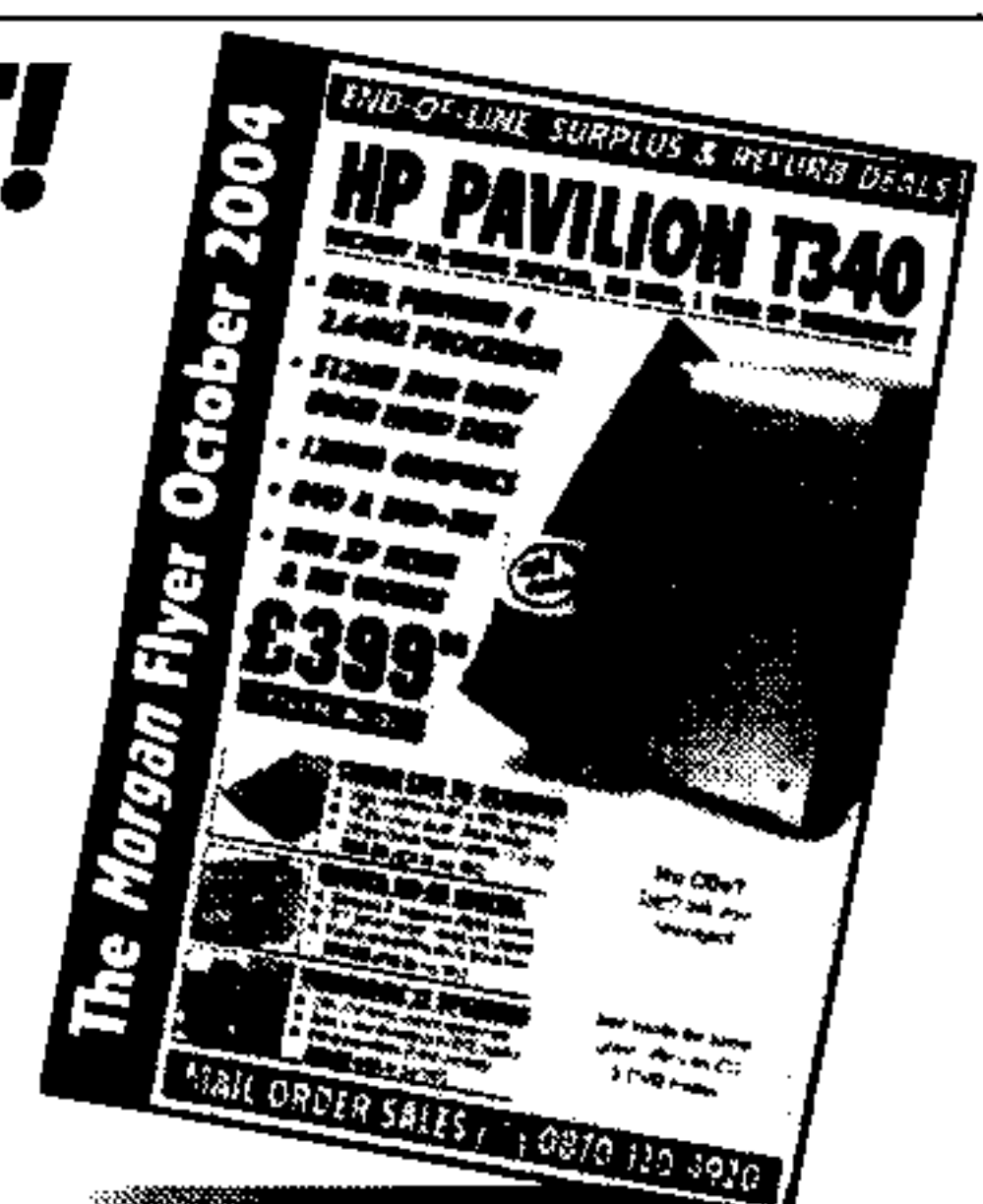
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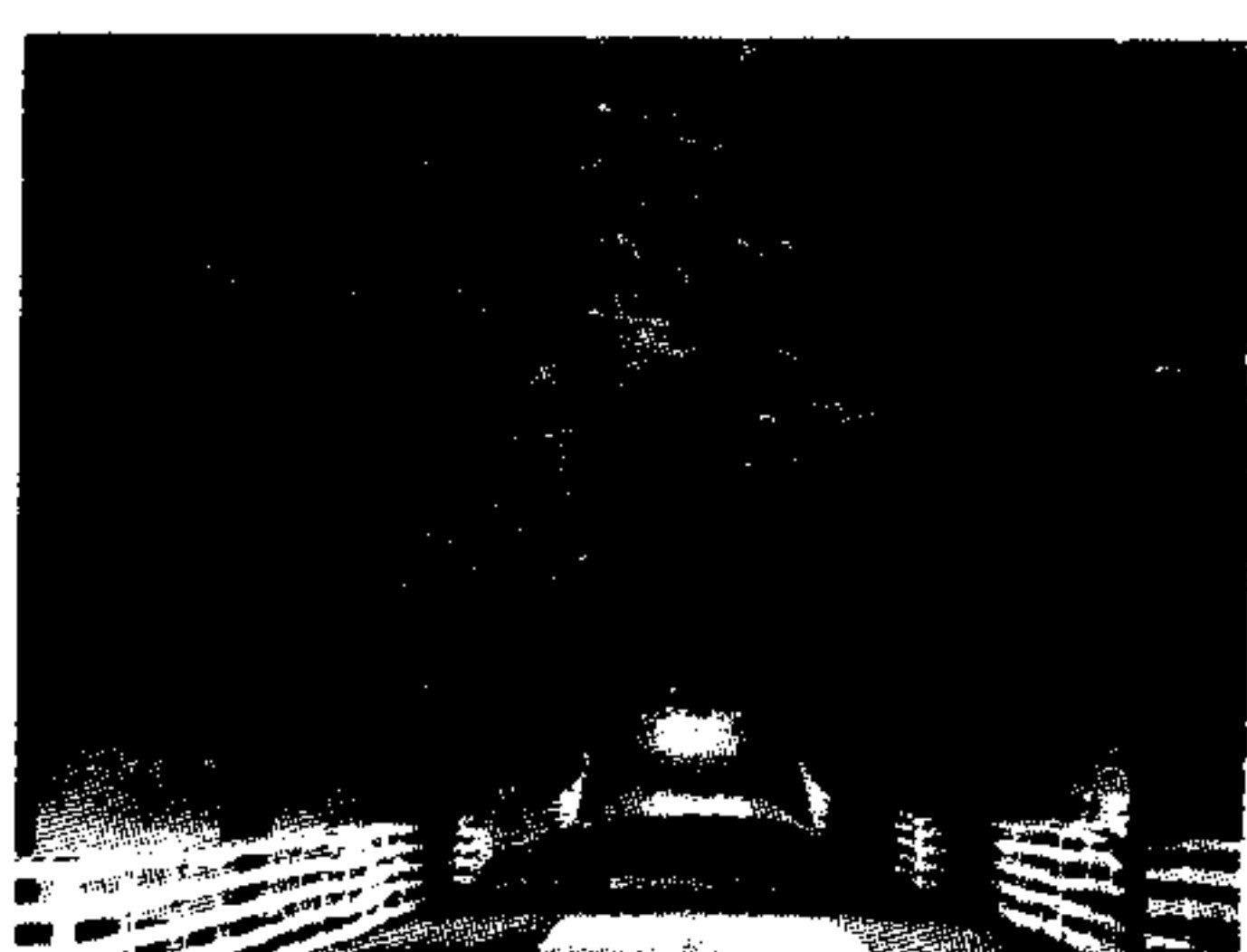
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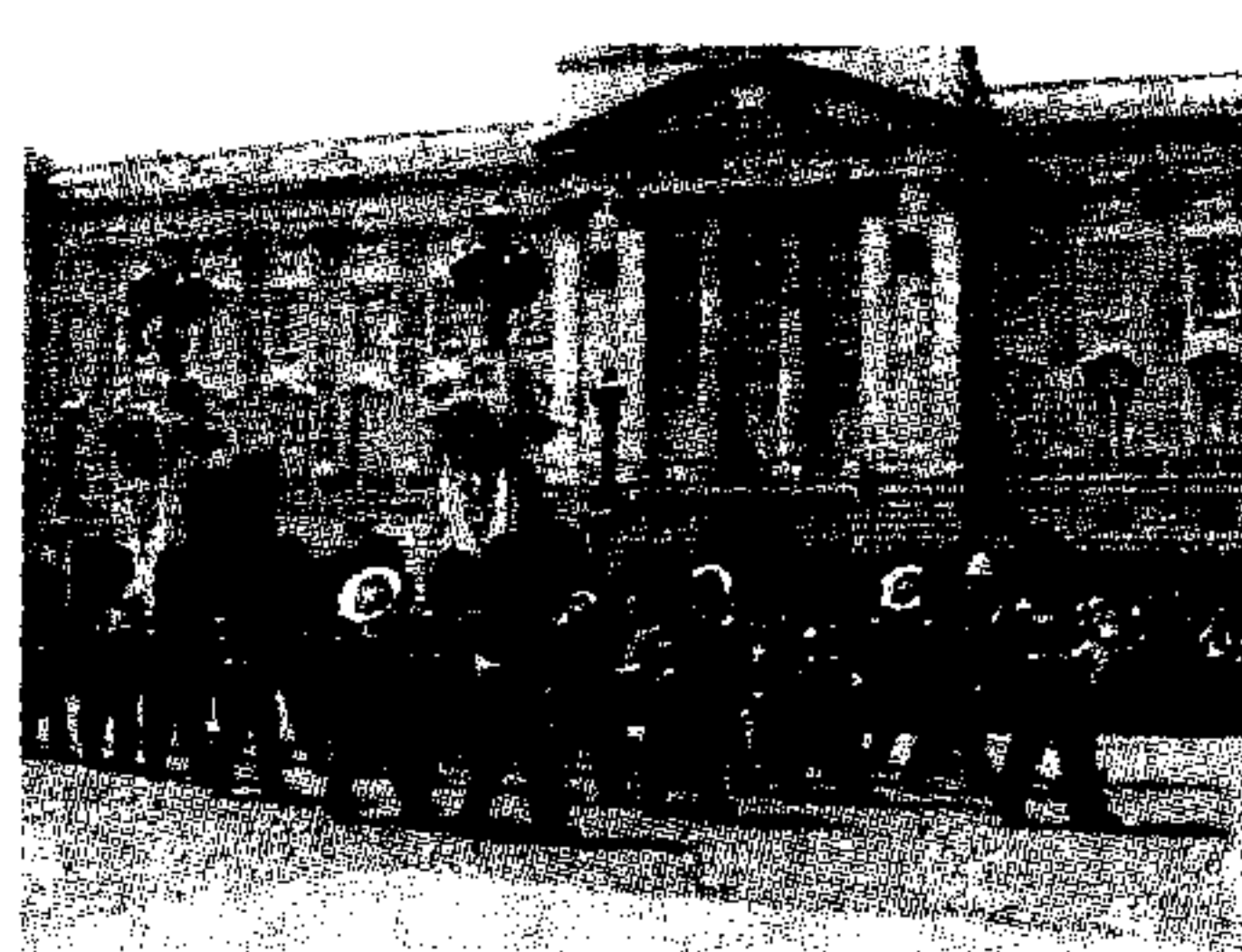




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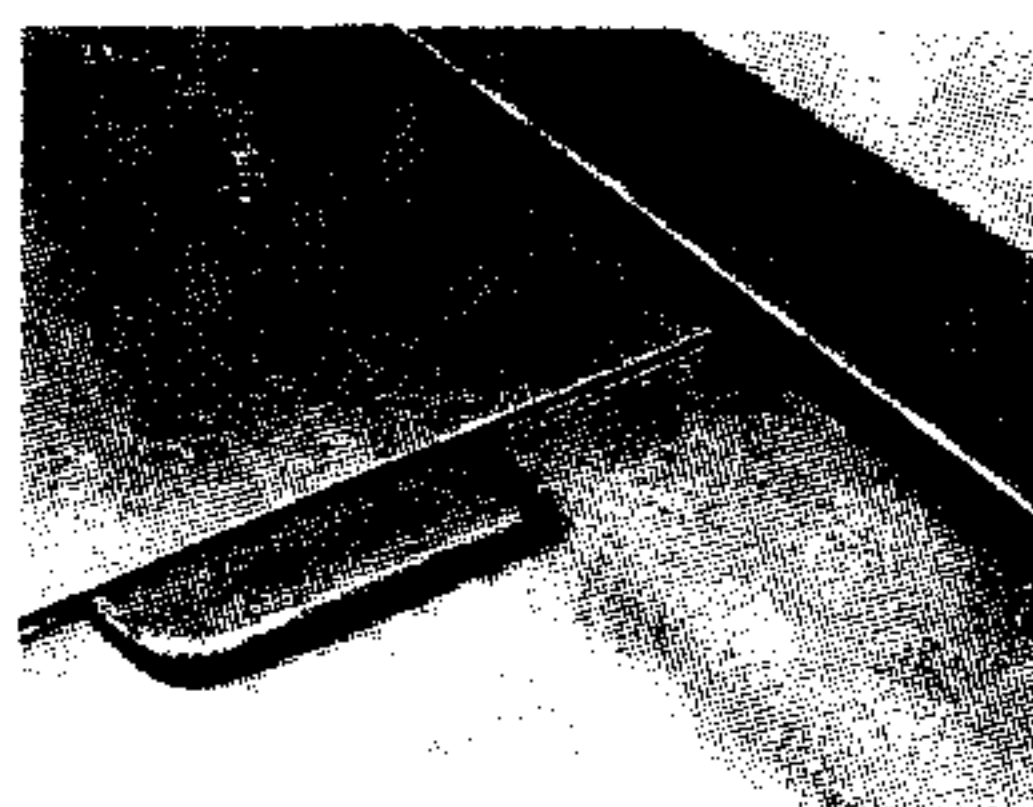
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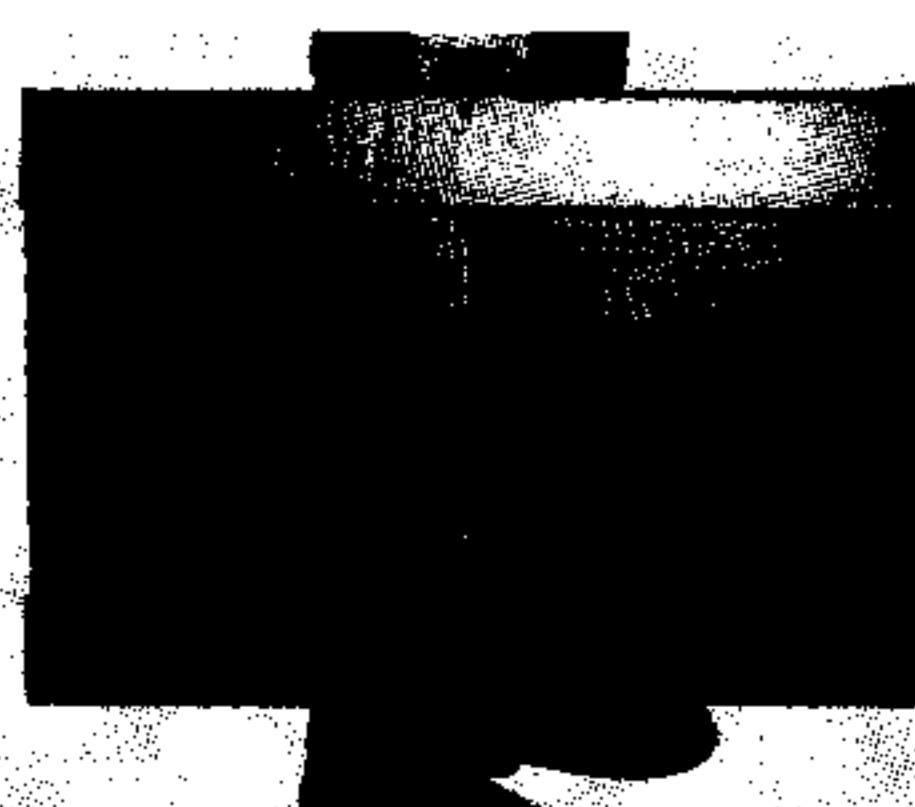
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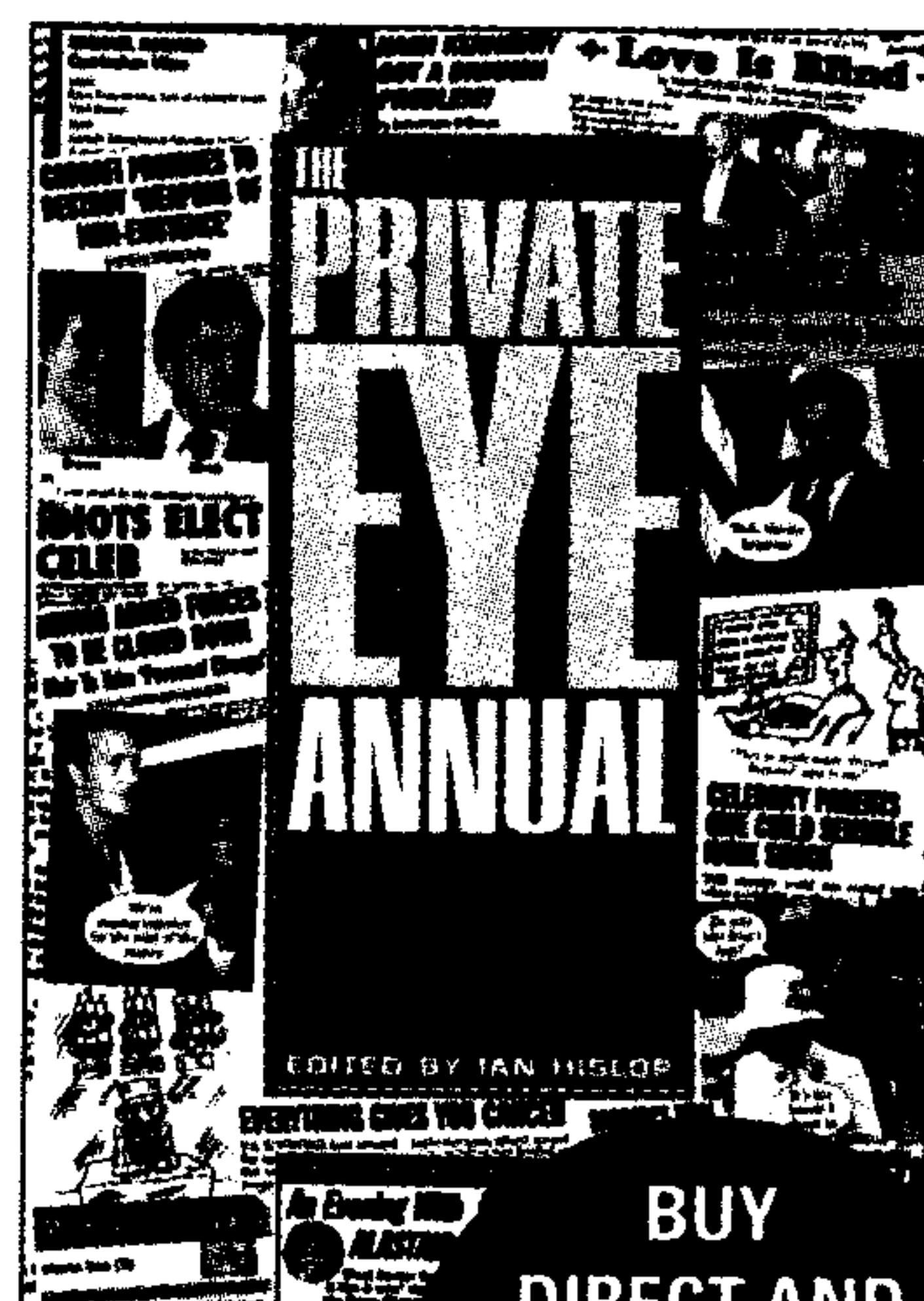
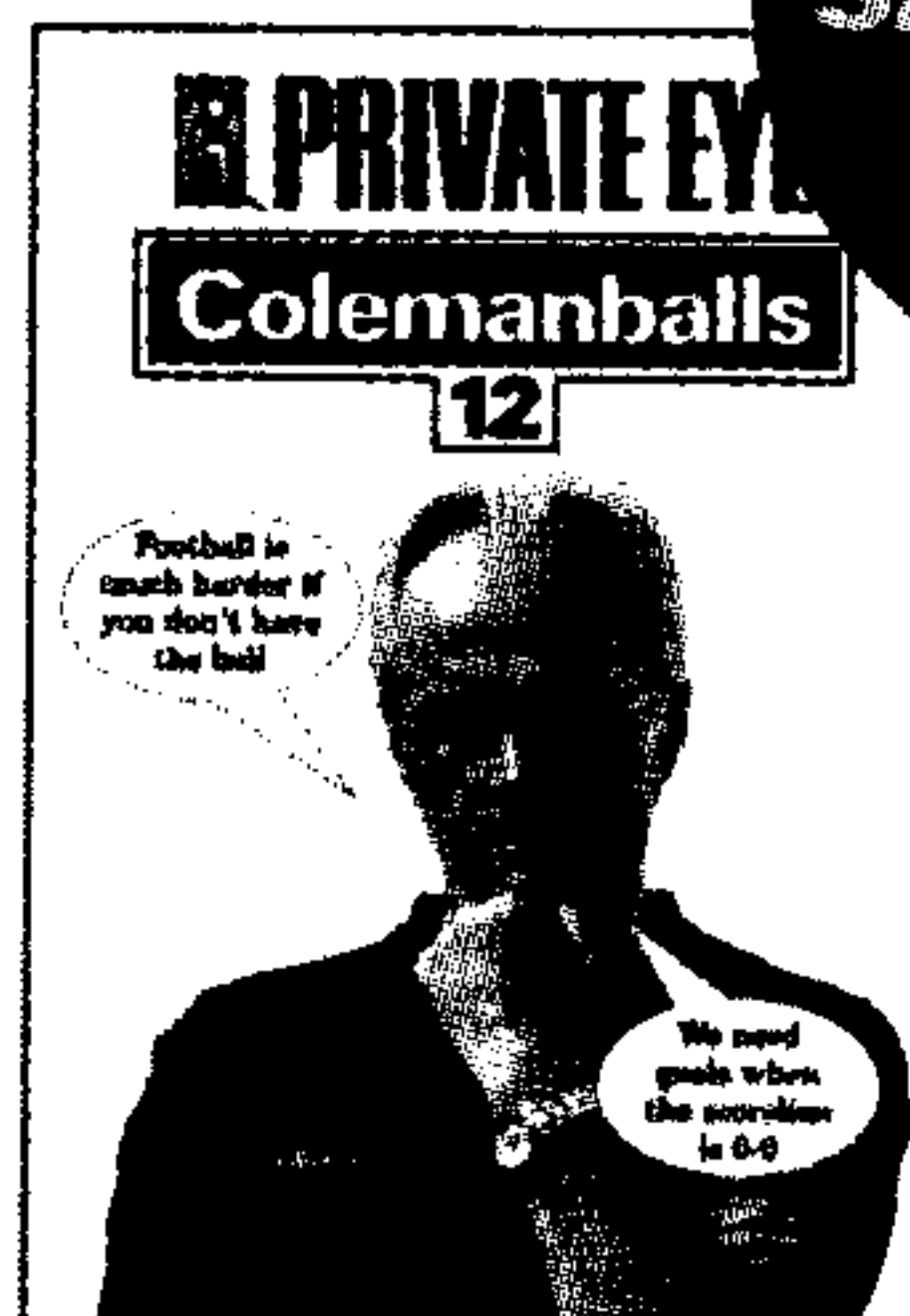
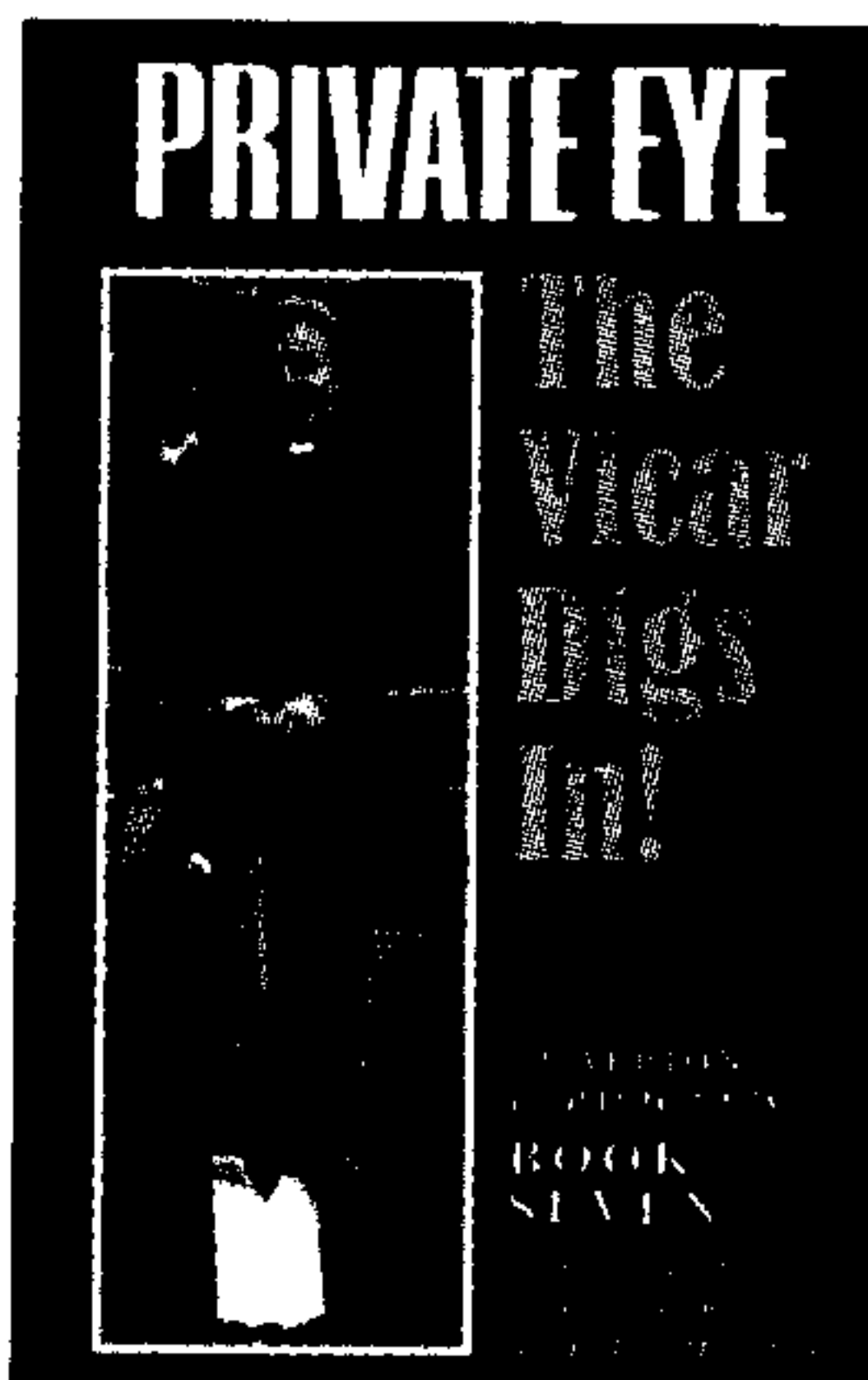
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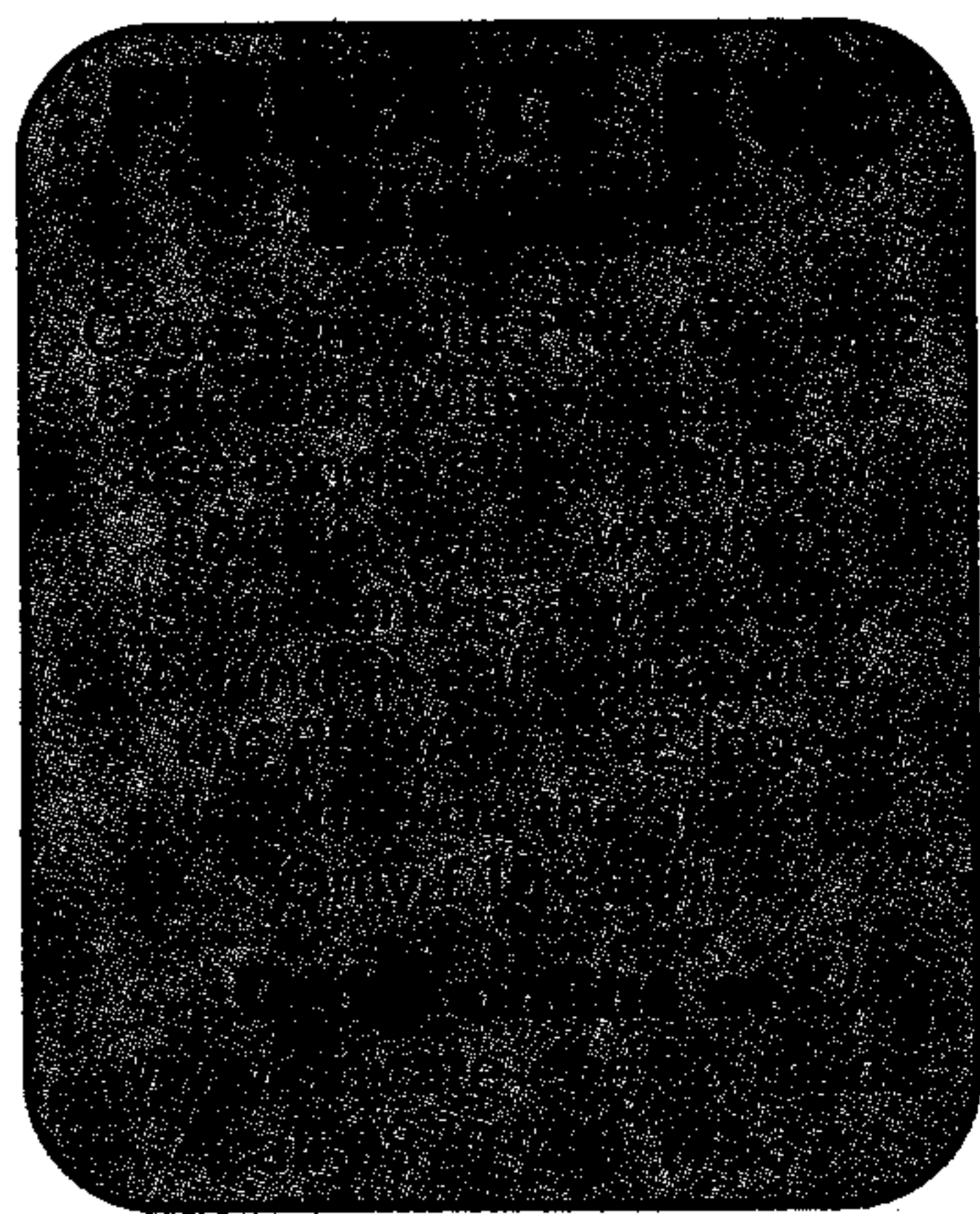
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SERIOUSLY DISABLED community worker faces eviction at Christmas. £4,300 needed immediately. Can repay over time. VERY genuine. Reply Box 110057.

EX-ABUSED SINGLE PARENT, teacher training, drowning with debts. Anything gratefully received. Abbey, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 25820158.

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SUDDENLY ENFORCED gap year pre-Cambridge student needs funds to join Democrat campaign in United States. Contact: ineedbushout@hotmail.com

INTELLIGENT BLONDE needs funds to escape life as pole dancer. S/C: 30-25-80. A/C: 02476401.

£350 NEEDED treating deserving girlfriend to luxury four-poster romance suite package. Contributions: D Morrison. Thanks. Reply Box 110213.

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COMMERCIAL PILOT TRAINING costs £59K, donations needed to fulfil lifelong ambition. Co-Op, S/C: 08-92-49. A/C: 01413845.

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YOUNG AUTHOR looking for funds to publish first book. Everything helps! LloydsTSB, S/C: 77-66-14, A/C: 14214360.

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ARTY, LITERATE, FEMALE (55), no brass, some strings, lots of wind; seeks educated, creative, witty male (50-60) as occasional accompanist, for Classical romance. Reply Box 110168.

ATTRACTIVE, INTELLIGENT, WELL CULTURED, professional black female 27 years old, would like to meet a solvent, sophisticated, attached male 40 years old and above for a mutually beneficial relationship. Enjoys wining, dining, conversations and travelling. Photo essential. halle14@aol.com Reply Box 110467.

PLEASANT GENTLEMAN, 43, 5' 5", seeks his soul mate, London. Mobile: 07767 253451. Email: joyfulsoulmate@aol.com

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LOOKING FOR EMMA BOVARY. Attached, successful media bloke, fiftyish and fit, wishes to spoil unappreciated female, 35-45 over long lunches and afters. Time we had some fun. Flaubert69@hotmail.com

HANDSOME, TALL, AMUSING MALE, 38, seeks attractive female for discrete passionate affair. Midlands / Bucks. Contact: jimanaffairtoremember@yahoo.co.uk

A GENEROUS, DISCERNING gentleman seeks a slim, beautiful, sensual lady (probably 35-45ish) for erotic liaisons and mutual reward. Photo greatly appreciated. Contact: agentlemanjames@hotmail.com

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CAN YOU FACE A CHALLENGE? Tight-fisted, miserable old git, (60): Inveterate liar, very deceitful but with good sense of humour seeks loving, caring, attractive Lady between the ages of 40 and 53 who will face a lifetime of drudgery with the only reward an occasional trip to McDonalds. South Coast based. If you think you can open this oyster and find the pearl please write to Box 110149 enclosing a recent photo.

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ATTACHED WOMAN, slim, attractive, fit, 50s seeks liberated male counterpart for occasional, uncomplicated fun. London / North West / Liverpool. Photo appreciated. Reply Box 110438.

GLAMOROUS, INTELLIGENT FEMALE, 35, seeks mentor, cosmopolitan, solvent, 46+ for a fabulous relationship. Email: ebony342634@aol.com

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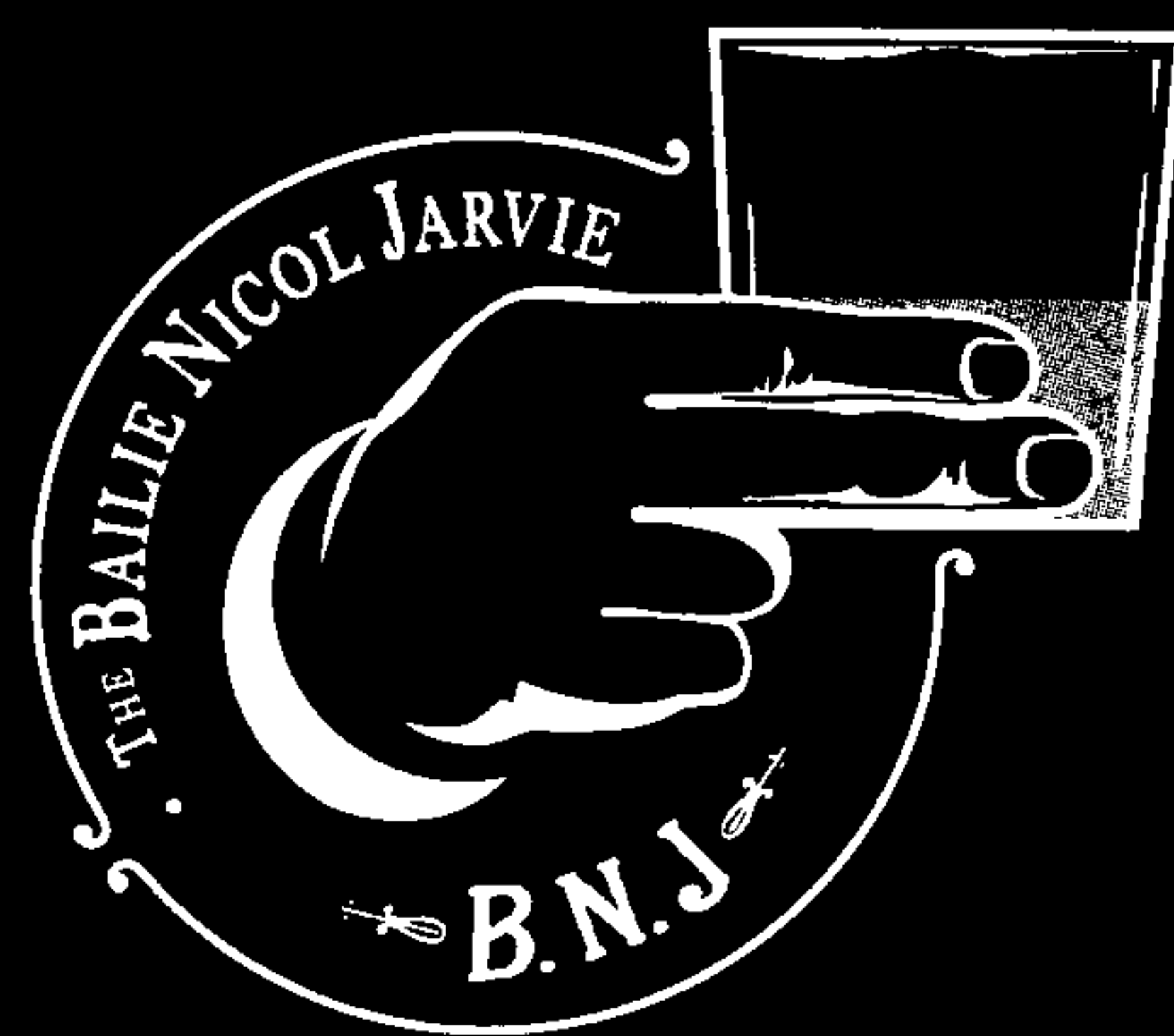
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